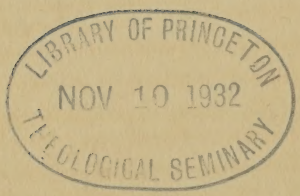
CAMEOS FROM CALVARY

J. G. W. WARD



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Rev. J. W. G. WARD, D.D.

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NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

CAMEOS FROM CALVARY
— B —
PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO THE CHURCHES

EMMANUEL, MONTREAL,
NEW COURT, LONDON,
AND
EMMANUEL, BOOTLE, LANC.

WHOSE AFFECTION HAS BEEN
AN UNFAILING INSPIRATION
THROUGH THE YEARS

FOREWORD

WITH the passing years it is almost inevitable that the events recorded in the Gospels should lose some of their vividness The characters tend to become mere figures of history, and the mind fails to realize that these were men and women of like passions with ourselves. This is peculiarly true of those who crowd our Lord's last week. Their schemings and subterfuges have lost their venom. Voices are no longer vibrant with hate. And pity for their ignorant prejudice displaces indignation. Our aim in these studies has been to set ourselves back amid the actual scenes of those momentous days which culminated in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on Calvary, and to re-clothe these people with pulsating humanity. We listen to the subtle plottings of those who seek His destruction, and witness the outworking of their enmity. There are tense moments when the destiny of the race hangs in the balance. Malice and duplicity are rampant. Yet against the sombre background, the superb character of Christ stands revealed in radiant splendour, as the stars shine bright in the skies of midnight. In the hope that the noble spirit of some who encircled His cross may inspire the heart with new enthusiasm and fervent love, and may make for a more virile faith, we send these studies forth on their wider ministry.

J. W. G. WARD.

EMMANUEL CHURCH,
MONTREAL.

CONTENTS

CAMEOS FROM CALVARY

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I

ANNAS, THE DEGENERATE

"To Annas first . . ."

—JOHN 18:13.

WOULD they never come? Annas turned his piercing eyes again to the door of his apartment, fingering his white beard angrily. His imperious will chafed against the delay. He was accustomed to have his orders carried out swiftly, but in this case any loss of time might mean all the difference between failure and success. His seventy years, far from mellowing his soul and diminishing his capacity for intrigue, had made him relentless when any one ventured to cross his path. It is true that he had much to embitter him. At the invitation of Herod the Great, he had exchanged Alexandria for Jerusalem some years before to become the High Priest of the Jews. The appointment was sanctioned by Quirinius in A.D. 6, and Annas began a lengthy period in which he exercised his authority with unquestioned right. But his arrogance, coupled with subtle manœuvres to increase his power, roused suspicion. His influence was seen to be a dangerous factor, and so after eight years, Valerius Gratus, who preceded Pilate in Judæa, deposed the High Priest from office.

Annas was not the man to relinquish the reins without a struggle. He could not withstand the authority of the Procurator, so he sought other means of retaining his power. Josephus records: "This elder Ananus was most fortunate, for he had five sons, and it happened they all held the office of High Priest to God." That simple statement indicates the course Annas pursued. He saw how he could keep his grip on the ecclesiastical and political life of the nation. His sons in turn succeeded him, but though they were each found objectionable by Rome, Annas remained the power behind the throne. None could measure the might of this unprincipled man. It were bad enough that one should grow old in wickedness without any signs of an operative conscience. But it were a thousand times worse when that man was the representative of God. In the one case, he dishonoured only his own name; in the latter, he dragged the holiest things in the mire, making religion a by-word. Entirely devoid of scruple, and planning only for his own aggrandizement, Annas stooped to anything and stopped at nothing. He was wealthy as well as powerful, and his most fruitful source of income was the most shameful. He had secured the monopoly in providing materials necessary for the Temple's requirements. Not only was it imperative that certain sacrifices be offered by the worshippers, but also that they should obtain the animals and birds from the booths which the sons of Annas controlled. In addition, a lucrative business was carried on in exchanging the money brought by pilgrims from afar. Their dues had to be paid, according to the Law, in the shekels of the sanctuary, and this would open

the way for skilful manipulation and dishonesty. The untutored country folk were easy victims for those who could ring the changes; and the varying rates of commission charged, together with the inclusion of counterfeit coins and the giving of wrong change, all provided a means of spoiling the stranger. The effect on the mind of the devout can be seen, and the Talmudic curse is significant: "Woe to the house of Annas! Woe to their serpent-like hissings." This refers to the whispers of the money-changers as they plundered the unwary, and the fierce protests which followed any attempt on the part of the victimized to get justice. Wickedness was firmly entrenched. Dryden says, "Had covetous men, as the fable of Briareus goes, each of them one hundred hands, they would all of them be employed in grasping and gathering, and hardly one of them in giving or laying out, but all in receiving and none in restoring; a thing in itself so monstrous, that nothing in Nature besides is like it, except it be death and the grave, the only things I know which are always carrying off the spoils of the world, and making no restitution." Certainly, there was no one who could call the High Priest to book, or get redress even if he accused Annas's sons. Though men's hearts grew hot, they were helpless in face of such established abuses.

There came a day, however, when that vested power was challenged. Annas met his match. Jesus had for some time caused great anxiety in the breast of the High Priest, and His shafts rankled in the minds of those against whose wickedness they were launched. But the Galilæan had not taken the law into His own hands, and the rulers were unable to

take action in any definite way. Then matters came to a head. Jesus had journeyed to the Capital in company with worshippers from all parts. It was feast-time, and business in the Temple precincts was brisk, when suddenly the Preacher strode through the cloisters. He saw what was going on. Perchance He heard some altercation between a pilgrim and one of the money-changers, and the words, "Cheat! Dishonest rogue!" smote on His ear. Obtaining a scourge of cords, He swept into the midst of buyers and sellers, and flinging over the tables at which these primitive Shylocks sat, careless of the scattering coins or the invective of the men concerned, He drove them into the open.

The curses of these discomfited profiteers were drowned by the laughter and applause of the onlookers. "Den of thieves was well said, Master!" cries one. "Yea, truly," adds another. "Too long have they been allowed to pilfer the hard-earned money of those who would worship the God of their fathers. Blessed be the name of the Lord who hath given us One to avenge the spoiled!" And the incident ended as the crowd melted into small groups.

Ended? Not if one knew Annas, the black-hearted! Word was carried to the chamber where business was planned and plots hatched. His face darkened with rage. To think that this Galilæan should dare to tamper with ancient rights and privileges! He would answer for His impertinence! The covetous heart of Annas knew no shame. He was not in the wrong; on the contrary, he had been wronged! And a plan of campaign was framed. The hour had struck. If it were not possible to arrest Jesus on this charge—and Annas probably

had some doubt regarding the expediency of it—other means must be devised.

Trusted conspirators met in this private room, their weak wills stiffened to decision by the vehemence that burned on the old man's lips. It was he who showed them how this end could be compassed. They were too fearful of consequences. Many a time, Annas had braved opposition, and as he pointed out, the worst troubles men ever endure are those which never happen. Let the Temple guard be reinforced by some whose support could be obtained for a consideration, and Jesus would soon be in their power!

"But why are they so long in coming?" Annas was strangely perturbed. He knew it was necessary to move warily. Before he confronted the Sanhedrin with this Man, he must be sure of his case—more sure than he could be of some of the Elders who had expressed sympathy with this Peasant-Preacher on more than one occasion. Annas turned to the heavily draped window and looked out. He could see no sign of the flickering torches that would betoken the returning guard. Then he smiled involuntarily at his own crassness. They would naturally extinguish the lights as soon as they laid hold of Him. He had not thought of that! There must be the utmost caution, or their plans were doomed to disaster.

The noise of hurrying feet was heard. The door was flung open. And Annas, hastily resuming his seat, tried to look as unconcerned and impartial as his position demanded. The Prisoner stood before him. The old ecclesiastic stifled a sigh of relief. The heavy lids scarcely concealed the satisfaction

with which he surveyed that figure with its hands bound together. This was a good omen. The initial move had succeeded, and in spite of the doubts of some, the scheme would be completed without a hitch. So Annas opened the examination. The fact that the entire proceeding was illegal, from the standpoint of both Roman and Jewish law, did not affect him in the least. A man so steeped in sin, who had grown old in cupidity and intrigue, was not to be deterred by any legal difficulties. Moreover, he was in the position of authority. He might not be officially regarded as the High Priest, but he did not admit for a moment the validity of the power which had dethroned him, even though it was that same power which had conferred the honour on him originally. He was in possession of the Prisoner, and possession was nine points of the law! So he proceeded to interrogate the Galilæan with scrupulous care. His questions reveal the fact to which we have referred: Annas was not sure of his case, and he required evidence that would enable him to send Jesus before the Sanhedrin with the issue decided. First he enquired of Him concerning His disciples and teaching. But if he expected to get some damaging admission from the Prisoner, he was disappointed. With masterly skill, Jesus turned each thrust like a swordsman deftly parrying the blow of his opponent. "I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue and in the Temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou Me? Ask them which heard Me, what I have said unto them."

Whether we grasp the significance of the reply

or not, Annas certainly did. It showed this plainly: not only was Jesus familiar with the law's requirements, but He also divined the object of His arrest. According to the legal code of that day, no prisoner arraigned on a capital charge might be questioned in this manner. The onus rested on the prosecution. It must substantiate the accusations step by step by its own witnesses. Jesus proved that He knew Annas's methods were contrary both to the letter and spirit of the law, and that there was a sinister motive behind this trial. The intention was to secure sentence of death whatever the evidence might prove. And the effect on Annas removed any doubt as to the accuracy of this conjecture. His clenched fist strikes the table. The veins standing out on his wrinkled brow indicate the unleashed passions within. The officer, taking his cue from his master, adds brutality to illegality by savagely striking the Prisoner in the face.

"Answerest thou the High Priest so?"

Jesus winced at the blow. It was as unexpected as it was undeserved. He turned to the man who had thus shown his officious zeal. There was only sadness in His voice, for none more willing than He to make allowance for human mistakes.

"If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou Me?"

Jesus had turned the tables on His accuser. This violence is an eloquent admission of defeat. But for upwards of an hour, the stupid farce went on. Annas, unwilling to admit that he was beaten, still hoped to cow the undaunted spirit of his enemy. If only he could get some word that might be construed into a threat against the State, as well as in

contravention of the Mosaic Law, all might yet be well. So no effort was spared to break down the courageous calm which Jesus manifested. Adjurations, gibes, and denunciation were all weapons in the armoury of this spiritual degenerate. Yet each arrow in turn broke on the impenetrable shield of that blameless life. The incident is a striking example of what Shakespeare had in mind when he wrote:

> "Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just,
> And he but naked, though locked up in steel,
> Whose conscience with injustice is corrupted."

While Jesus confronted His accuser with unperturbed soul, what were the feelings of Annas? Perhaps his conscience was stirred; that would serve only to inflame his anger the more. Charles Dickens shows us the effect wrought by one pure life upon another dissolute soul, and the parallel is suggestive in the extreme. When Sidney Carton comes into contact with the noble-hearted Lucy Manette, it is as though he were lifted to a point of vantage from which a new plane of being became visible. He had seen her beautiful devotion to her father, the old prisoner liberated from the Bastille, and against her pure life, Carton felt the shame of his own ways thrown into violent contrast. He was moved to the depths. In a memorable interview in the Doctor's London garden, Carton confessed this. "I wish you to know," he says to Miss Manette, "that you have been the last dream of my soul. In my degradation I have not been so degraded, but that the sight of you with your father, and of this

home, made such a home by you, has stirred old shadows that I thought had died out of me. Since I knew you, I have been troubled with a remorse that I thought would never reproach me again, and have heard whispers from old voices impelling me upward that I thought were silent for ever."

In Carton's case, those feelings were not allowed to pass without being turned to some practical good. Eventually, he gave his life to prove the sincerity of his words. But in the case of Annas, was there not also some effect when confronted by Christ? Momentarily, he must have seen himself in the mirror of memory. In those far-away days in Alexandria, he had not been without some response to the good. He was impelled to devote his life to philosophy and religion. The lofty minds of the past led his feet along the paths of knowledge. While some took the ways of pleasure, and others sought the prizes of the senate and the marketplace, he had dedicated himself to higher things. The door of opportunity swung on its hinges. The summons to Jerusalem, that city of sacred memories and holy privileges, with its historic buildings from every stone of which inspiration seemed to exude, made an irresistible appeal. And he was duly installed as God's High Priest. Clad in the vestments of that exalted office, he felt the worth of the spiritual in a way that overwhelmed him. When on the solemn Day of Atonement he laid aside those regal robes, and went forth in a simple garment expressive of holiness, bearing the blood of sacrifice, to make intercession for the expectant people, he reached the high-water mark of spiritual emotion.

All that came back to him as he sat moodily contemplating his Prisoner. His was the tragedy of degeneration. He had permitted himself to grow familiar with sacred things. Wonder had died from his heart. Instead of being a man of God, he had come to regard himself as a god of men, receiving their homage not because of the holy functions he exercised, but as though it were his by right. Secure from criticism from below, Annas resolutely excluded any thought of judgment from above. The fruits of office were rich. He was the pivot on which everything centred, and he utilized his power to the full. As quaint old Tupper has it, "The love of money is the root of all evil. It grows up like a little plant of coveting; presently the leaves get rank, the branches spread and feed on petty thefts; then in their early seasons come the blossoms: black designs, plots involved and undeveloped yet, of foul conspiracies, extortions on the weak, rich robbings of the wealthy, the threatened slander, the rewarded lie, malice, perjury, sacrilege. Then speedily cometh on the climax, the consummate flower, the dark-red murder. And the fruit, bearing in itself the seeds that never die, is righteous, wrathful condemnation." Strong though the language, Annas merits it all. His undisputed rule gave him a mighty lever by which to lift himself to an even more exalted position in the state, and by which others might be removed from his path. Proof is found in subsequent events. Rome was tolerant regarding the religious customs of the peoples she subjugated. So long as a nation were peaceful, paid its dues, and gave the government no trouble, it would not be molested. The fact is,

Rome had more important matters with which to concern herself. The organization of her territorial acquisitions kept her fully occupied. It was only when there was the likelihood of revolt or tumult that she intervened. There were disquieting signs in Judæa, and in spite of all his sanctimonious assurances, it was felt Annas was not to be trusted. So Valerius thrust the High Priest from his seat before it was too late.

Such were the thoughts of this one-time servant of Jehovah. Looking into the face of this Man of whom nothing but good could be proved, it maddened him to think from what he had fallen. Far from being moved by any feelings of humanity, Annas, whose name stood for "The Merciful," showed how far he had declined from honour. He would not relent! He would bring this Man who had dared to set His puny will against His betters down to the dust. And though it were impossible to get any justification of such an end from His own lips, there were other means. This cynical hypocrite was a past-master in the art of discovering by-paths of guile, and all that follows shows the real character of the man.

A messenger entered the room. He stood obsequiously by, waiting for the signal to approach. Then he imparted the news that the Sanhedrin had been called together and wished to know his pleasure. A gleam of satisfaction flashed across the withered face. A word of command to the officer, a whispered communication to the messenger, and the Prisoner was pushed unceremoniously towards the door. The guard formed about Him, and the party then made its way across the courtyard, past

a fire where a group stood talking, and into the house of Caiaphas, where an emergency meeting of the Sanhedrin had been convened.

As the sound of the retreating footsteps died away, were there no regrets in the heart of Annas? Was there no feeling of remorse? Probably not. That is the appalling fact of sin: it deadens the soul. The petrifying springs that are found in Britain provide a singular analogy. An object placed beneath the constantly dripping water as it comes through the limestone rock is gradually transformed into a solid mass. The branch of a tree, for example, which had possibilities of bloom and fruit may be completely changed in time, though the water looks innocuous enough. Yet as it falls, drop by drop, it deposits its sediment until every vestige of life is gone. So it is with conscience. The time for repentance had passed as far as Annas was concerned. He had deliberately chosen the second-best rather than the best; then he had fixed his affections on evil rather than on the good. Like Esau, he had bartered his birthright for a mess of pottage. No matter what he had gained, even though the world were his, what was the use if he had lost his own soul? It was even as this despised Galilæan had said.

Undue familiarity with sacred things is its own Nemesis. Annas had withstood the promptings of the Divine Spirit so long that he was uninfluenced by anything higher than his own base ends. It was tragic. Here was a man, incapable of using the splendid faculties with which he had been endowed. He might have wrought good in the world; instead he wrought only hurt to others and to himself. He

might have been the transmitter as well as the recipient of the blessings of the Almighty. And a like temptation to turn from the highest assails every soul. The man in the ministerial office is perhaps peculiarly susceptible to it. He is in daily contact with spiritual things. He handles the sacred vessels of the Lord: those hands must be clean. He imparts counsel to others, and sets forth God's will for His people: yet his own soul must be guided by that counsel and controlled by that will. The Apostle Paul was filled with concern lest, when he had preached to others, he himself might become a castaway. While in the well-known words of Ophelia the matter is expressed from another angle:

> "Do not, as some ungracious pastors do,
> Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven;
> Whilst, like a puff'd and reckless libertine,
> Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads,
> And recks not his own rede."

Yet that applies to us all. We must jealously guard the shrine of the soul. It must be kept unpolluted by the feet of the mere chafferer of the market. The heart must never be allowed to lose its sensitiveness to the voice of God. And this can be accomplished only by setting vigilant sentinels at the portals of the inner life, and keeping the soul in tune with the Infinite.

II

CAIAPHAS, THE TIME-SERVER

"Unto Caiaphas, the High Priest."
—JOHN 18 : 24.

CAIAPHAS, the son-in-law of old Annas, knew which was the main chance. His eyes had always been upon it. A marriage of convenience had proved the Open Sesame to a position which he had hardly dreamed possible. But like Faust himself, he was ready to sell his soul. He was prepared to prostitute even the sacred estate of marriage to compass his unworthy ends. Annas had fallen into disrepute. He had played his game both skilfully and unscrupulously. His sons who followed him in the sacred office followed his injunctions, but it was seen that this was only a ruse to keep his hand on national affairs. Valerius decided that neither Annas nor any of his family could be tolerated any longer. But the Procurator was busy with other matters of administration, and even were it not so, it is doubtful if he would have been a match for the cunning of Annas.

When the office of High Priest fell vacant, a nomination which came from an entirely different quarter seemed quite satisfactory. Valerius was not to know what had been arranged, but a marriage-alliance between Caiaphas and the daughter of Annas brought the former into the line of succession.

The Procurator did not know Caiaphas; he certainly did not know Annas either. So the new High Priest was duly installed, and later, the bargain made in secret was duly completed. Caiaphas and the ex-High Priest's daughter were married. And though the new occupant of that exalted office may have flattered himself that he was now supreme in the hierarchy of the nation, he subsequently discovered that he was, in reality, only another tool in the hands of his predecessor—a tool if not a fool! Nor did it take long to show that. His decisions were overruled by the older man. His policy was dictated by orders emanating from the same source. Still, he accepted the inevitable with the best grace he could, believing that in the nature of things, time would eventually exact its toll, and the day of undisputed authority and untrammelled ambition would dawn.

While Caiaphas was intent on his own advancement, he began to see that his power was being undermined. This was due more to the advent of Jesus than to Annas. And while he and his father-in-law were antagonistic towards each other in other ways there was one subject on which they entirely agreed. That was their detestation of the Galilæan. For one thing, He was too out-spoken; for another, He was disseminating doctrines repugnant to them both. They were Sadducees, and had no belief in any future life; but this Man had. Moreover, He taught that the requirements of God were practical, rather than ceremonial. He shared the heresies of men like Amos, who decried sacrifice, and urged obedience to the will of God instead;—as though sacrifice were not obedience to that will! In doing

that, Jesus was cutting at the root of their financial undertakings. Once let such ideas gain favour with the people, and what would become of the trade in sacrificial animals they had so laboriously built up? Nor was that all. Jesus not only emphasized man's responsibility before God, but openly taught that reward or retribution would follow in a future life.

Caiaphas opposed such dangerous doctrines with all the prejudice and ferocity of the partisan, and a crisis was precipitated by the raising of Lazarus. Tennyson graphically describes it:

> "When Lazarus left his charnel-cave,
> And hope to Mary's house returned . . .
> From every house the neighbours met,
> The streets were fill'd with joyful sound,
> A solemn gladness even crown'd
> The purple brows of Olivet."

The consequences were easy to forecast. One who could do such incredible works would create a furore. The people might turn to Him, hailing Him as the expected deliverer, and the resulting tumult would inevitably bring the punitive hand of Rome upon the rulers. What had happened before to Annas might happen again, and Caiaphas would be thrust from power. This was the fear that shadowed his vile heart. He tried to drape it with the robe of patriotism, but his concern was not for his people, but for his position. The matter was laid before the Council, and the gravity of the situation was pointed out:

"What do we, for this Man doeth many miracles? If we let Him thus alone, all men will believe on

Him, and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation."

He gauged the impression these words made. While some were greatly perturbed, there were others who remained unconvinced. Then the High Priest launched his missile:

"Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, that the whole nation perish not!"

That view might seem disinterested did we not perceive the cloven hoof in its phrasing. "It is expedient for *us* that one man should die." Queen Victoria was asked to append her signature to an order for which one of her Cabinet required the royal assent. He urged it on grounds of expediency, but she demurred. "I have been taught that some things are right, and others wrong; but I have never been instructed in what is expedient. Is this right?" And the order remained unsigned. But Caiaphas was not troubled by such fine distinctions. He saw the danger. He saw too that the swiftest way of averting it was to silence this obnoxious Teacher once for all. Happily for the small degree of self-respect remaining to the Sanhedrin, it refused to act, and the issue was undecided. Yet that was only for a time. Annas and he talked over the matter, and formulating plans from which nothing would turn them aside, they waited their chance. The months passed, but sooner or later, they would gain their goal.

Now we understand why Jesus was arrested with such secrecy. Perhaps Annas felt that so many pilgrims being in the city might jeopardize their scheme, and they were disposed to wait until the

Feast was over. But the incident of cleansing the Temple gave them the opportunity they sought. The conspirators had good ground for taking action, and hoped therefore to carry the Council with them. Yet at all costs, they must avoid any publicity that would incite a public demonstration of sympathy. So with the autocrat's suspicion of democracy, steps were taken for a sudden coup. The course might be contrary to the law, but in the opinion of both Annas and Caiaphas the end would justify the means. Once get the Galilæan in their power, and steps could later be taken to overcome the scruples of the Sanhedrin on the grounds of urgency.

> "No ceremony that to great ones 'longs,
> Not the king's crown, nor the deputed sword,
> The marshal's baton, nor the judge's robe,
> Become them with one-half so good a grace
> As mercy does."

But these ecclesiastics were merciless.

The Council over which Caiaphas presided that night was possibly only partly attended. It consisted nominally of seventy members, and was a survival of the idea instituted by Moses when he chose, under the Divine direction, seventy elders to assist him in legislating for the tribes. We have no conclusive information as to the mode of election to the assembly, but its members were of pronounced Sadducean tendencies, and were largely drawn from the ranks of the priests and scribes. The qualifications for the position were that a man should be learned, popular, and humble. Yet a man might possess these sterling qualities without necessarily being of

a deeply religious character. While the functions of the Council were primarily spiritual, it had also a voice in determining national policy, and exercised considerable authority over the people themselves. Self-government had been accorded within measure by the imperial power. The Sanhedrin could arrest and punish men for breaches of their laws, but the right of inflicting the death penalty was vested solely in the Roman governor. We may note in passing that although Stephen was stoned to death by its authority, the proceeding was as illegal as the trial of Jesus, and that sentence was the equivalent of a modern lynching.

Still bound, and under guard, Christ was arraigned before the Elders of His own race. But before His foes could hope to secure sentence of death from the Procurator, they must arrive at some verdict that would seem to justify such an extreme measure. So the trial was hurried on. Their object was, however, not so much to give Him a trial as to secure His condemnation. It would be useless to go to Pilate with any complaint about His disregard of the Mosaic traditions. That was a matter for the Jewish rulers, and did not come within his purview. Questions of His neglect of their established customs, or His supposed violation of the Sabbath, would be brushed aside as childish. Some charge of greater import must by some means be laid at the door of this Preacher who had shaken society to its foundations. Yet they had to proceed with some regard for their legal code, and the case must first be heard by their own court. The fact that a prisoner on trial for his life had the right to bring witnesses for the defence before those of the

prosecution were heard, was waived. He had no such witnesses—as they were careful to see before the court was constituted. They had, therefore, to deal with the evidence which was available, and for which, naturally, impartial judges could assume no responsibility!

What was the charge preferred against Jesus? The Prisoner had a right to know, and the witnesses were duly called. It appears from the Gospel of Matthew that a number of men had been brought promiscuously together to give evidence. Probably they heard that there was money to be made out of it, and while they refused to divulge the exact nature of the information at their disposal, a significant raising of the eyebrow, or an inclination of the head would imply:

> "I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
> Would harrow up thy soul."

The tale did not, however, materialize. From the standpoint of those who were so anxious to make out their case, their testimony proved worthless. They had no facts to substantiate their statements, and convincing though their story might be for those willing to be convinced, they would certainly not command the assent of Pilate. Matters were not going well for the plotters, and Caiaphas was ruffled. The savage curl of his lip, as one after another stood down, showed his anger. It looked as though he were to be denied success just when it was within his reach. The list of witnesses was rapidly nearing the end, and the advisability of spiriting the Prisoner away until the time was more

opportune had occurred to the High Priest's mind, when hope dawned. Two were at last found to corroborate each other. They both declared: "We heard Him say, I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands." It was only a garbled statement of something Christ had said, but though inaccurate and grossly unfair, there was some truth underlying it. That His words had been wrenched from their context, that what He had said metaphorically had been literalized, went for nothing. There were some there who remembered the utterance, though they did not care to recall the reason for it.

The Jews had come demanding, "What sign showest Thou unto us, seeing Thou doest these things?" He replied, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Their retort was, "Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt Thou rear it up in three days?" They were right. The temple built by Herod the Great to supersede the structure restored by Zerubbabel had taken that length of time. The walls and colonnades had required eight years to build, the temple proper took a year and a half, while the grandiose scheme with its imposing cloisters and various buildings, including probably the hall in which the Sanhedrin met, took another thirty-seven years before completion. So they were right—and they were wrong. These were presumably men of light and leading, and they must have known that this was either the irresponsible boast of one who was not to be taken seriously, or else—and it is the only fair construction that could be put on His words—that this Teacher

meant something entirely different. In any case, it may well puzzle us to see how they could interpret that statement as a threat against the good governance of the people. Yet they did. They read into Christ's words tumult and insurrection. The overthrow of the Temple would precede an armed attack on the community. Jerusalem would lie in ruins. The peace of the nation was menaced, and Pilate would now have a case which he would be compelled to handle with firmness and despatch. Caiaphas's spirits rose as he listened. This was precisely what he desired. And yet he was chagrined to notice that the Council as a whole did not seem convinced. He saw the advantage must be followed up. Although he was presiding, and was therefore supposed to be strictly impartial, he stepped into the breach.

"Answerest Thou nothing? What is it that these witness against Thee?"

It angered him to find his Prisoner was astute enough to be silent. That is a fortress often without a loophole for attack. Get Him into the open, force Him to speak, rouse Him so that He would lose His self-control—then Caiaphas felt he might secure what even Annas had failed to get: some rash or injudicious statement that would compromise Christ and settle His fate. Once more the High Priest spoke: "I adjure Thee by the living God that Thou tell us whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of God."

It was a bold stroke. There was a touch of genius in the strategy. Caiaphas had placed Jesus on the horns of a dilemma. Either He must speak, and so commit Himself to the Messianic mission; or else, re-

maining silent, discredit Himself in the eyes of those who already professed belief in Him. In either case, there was ground for Pilate to act with ruthless hand. Rome had little patience and less pity for any who laid claim to temporal power, and thus challenged her supremacy. Any one who spread sedition or deceived the people likewise fell under her ban. Caiaphas waited. Would Jesus answer? Looking him straight in the face, the Master said:

"Thou hast said. Nevertheless, I say unto you, hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven."

It required all the histrionic ability Caiaphas possessed to conceal the satisfaction this answer gave. But he had not yet carried his point. With assumed horror and indignation, he sprang up in his place, and tore his robes convulsively in twain.

"He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard His blasphemy. What think ye?"

The High Priest looked round the assembly with an air of mastery. He was inwardly exulting, for this was more than he had even dared to hope. While the councillors who had been inclined to treat Jesus with leniency, now saw that their president had in turn thrust them into a dilemma. There was no question about that. They were solemnly sworn to uphold the purity of their religion and the supreme rights of Jehovah, and now they had to choose between Jesus and their standing with the people. So reluctantly admitting the domination of Caiaphas, they assented to the verdict forced upon them:

"He is guilty of death."

Perhaps there were some who remained unconvinced. They may even have had the courage to express their dissent. For instance, it is difficult to believe that sincere men like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathæa, were they present, could sit there without voicing their protests. But if any did so, their words were drowned in the babel that broke out. The Prisoner was condemned. According to their law they could stone Him to death for this offence, and yet, galling to remember, according to Roman edicts, they could do nothing of the kind. They must get the permission of an alien power to carry out their own sentence! That may account for the brutality which marked this stage of the proceedings. It was immaterial that the trial was irregular, or that there had been a flagrant disregard of the law they professed so jealously to uphold. The misuse of evidence has been mentioned; but the court itself could not be legally convened before daybreak. To what lengths will hatred go to secure its vile ends! And one illegality followed another. This gross travesty of justice was supplemented by rough horse-play. The guards spat in the Prisoner's face. They flung the robe over His eyes, and then bade Him, who posed as a prophet of the unseen, say who had struck Him. Revolting in the extreme, these honourable councillors met in the name of religion could look on at such a scene with tacit approval, and none seems to have thought that:

> ". . . We do pray for mercy;
> And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
> The deeds of mercy."

Time was speeding by. Day was at hand, and haste was necessary if the veil of secrecy were still to be kept intact, and Jesus was led away to the judgment hall of Pilate. The disgusting marks of their violence were still upon Him, but the more disreputable the Prisoner looked, the better chance there was that the governor would dispose of the case without undue formality. Yet a grave question comes demanding an answer of faith. Why should these things be? Why should God permit His Son to be maltreated in this way? And then, remembering the faculty of free will with which He has endowed man, we see there must inevitably be the possibility of its misuse. Caiaphas, the embodiment of cunning and craftiness, is essentially the time-server. Like Annas, he misused his undoubted gifts of leadership. He could have asserted his sway over his fellow-men to reinforce the good. But he is not alone in that. Every life is fraught with tremendous possibilities. Whether it yields blessedness or woe is largely determined by choice. Man can decide in which direction he will pour out the energies of his soul. To live merely for the temporal involves moral deterioration; but to live for the higher realities means securing not only the unfading treasure, but also that life which is life indeed, and which shall endure for evermore.

III

THE GOOD MAN OF THE HOUSE

"Ye shall say unto the good man of the house, The Master saith unto thee, where is the guest-chamber, where I shall eat the Passover with My disciples?"

—LUKE 22:11.

WE turn back from the tragic scenes of that early morning to the previous day with its tender memories and healing words. Jesus had expressed the wish to eat the paschal meal with His disciples, and two of them were despatched to make the necessary arrangements with the owner of the guest-chamber. At once we ask, who was he? This "good man of the house" exerts on our minds all the fascination of the unknown. He also illustrates that which we are prone to forget. Many a loyal heart beats in an obscure breast. Many a noble deed is veiled in anonymity. It makes us the more eager to know this unnamed man who gave Jesus the hospitality of his home.

The Gospels tell us just enough to whet our curiosity. Our Lord was spending that last week with His friends in Bethany. The little town lay over the brow of Olivet, and for Passover purposes was reckoned to be within the limits of the holy city. The reason for that is evident. The influx of pilgrims at such times was so great that Jerusalem

could not accommodate them. Yet as can be understood, Jesus wished to celebrate that last feast within the confines of the city itself. It was fitting that He should do so. The Lamb of God, of whom the thousands of lambs sacrificed at that season were the type, must perforce be in the centre of holy and historic symbolism. Christ therefore instructed Peter and John to go thither and prepare for His coming. Here an element of mystery meets us. They were to go into the city, and to look for a man carrying a pitcher from the well. He would guide them to the unknown friend at whose house the Passover was to be observed. Yet it would seem an impossible task to find the right man? Not when we recall that such a menial duty as carrying water was usually performed by women. A man so engaged would be easily noted. But we meet with another objection. If this were meant to be a secret sign, would not one so conspicuous excite comment? Not at this particular season, for one of the men of the family was required to draw the water used for making the unleavened bread. And thus early in the day, this messenger would be one of very few there, and so would be readily recognized.

These precautions seem elaborate, and yet there was a reason for them. This unknown admirer of the Master had previously offered the use of his guest-chamber, but it was difficult to forecast the precise movements of the apostolic company or of Christ's enemies. Jesus knew plots were afoot. Already the cross had cast its shadow across His path. There was no doubt about the issue of that week, but when the blow would fall was hidden at least from the good man of the house. How should

he know whether the Master would honour his roof or not? It was he who suggested a means of communication.

"Lo, Master, it shall be for Thee to decide if this privilege shall be mine. If I have no tidings of Thee before the day preceding the Feast, then will I send one who can be trusted, and he shall wait by the spring nigh unto the city. There let Thy disciples look for him, but let them not talk with him there before curious eyes, for it might cause some to learn where Thou wilt be. He too will look for them, and they have but to follow him to my abode. Then when they ask of me concerning the guest-chamber, I shall know that they are not chance strangers, but from Thyself. Yet they must needs follow him, for mine house is in a secluded spot, by the farther fringe of the city walls. Few pass that way. The better, therefore, will it promise Thee unbroken peace for that hour with Thy friends."

Jesus smiled at the man's solicitude, misconstruing His desire for quietude into fear of His enemies. His own wish would have been to have spent that last night alone with His Father upon the hills, that He might be strengthened for the ordeal which awaited Him. Yet that would have been unlike Christ. His thought was always for His disciples. They too had need of comfort and solace, and so He would lavish those last hours on them that together they might rejoice in the salvation of God. To this end, however, it was important that their privacy should be undisturbed. Judas had shown signs of disloyalty that, hidden from the eyes of the rest, were plainly read by the

Saviour. But by acting on the suggestion of the good man, the rendezvous could be fixed without any one but the two knowing its location. So when they received such explicit instructions, Peter and John seemed to grasp their import. They came to the spring as directed, and as they caught sight of a youth who raised his earthen jar with meticulous care, John touched Peter's arm.

"Methought it would have been a servant on such an errand, but by his dress, I judge it to be the son of the good man. Thinkest thou that this is he whom we seek?"

"Yea, verily. Didst thou not see the glance he gave us, as though he understood that we were the Master's messengers? Let us follow him, though at a distance lest any divine our object. Our Lord would fain spend that hour without the company of any of Caiaphas's friends!"

"Speak not of that man, Peter! I mislike his crafty ways. To think that the High Priest of Jehovah should plot thus against the noblest Man that ever walked the earth!"

The youth had proceeded on his way, and the two disciples as though intent on some affair of their own, leisurely took the same direction, discreetly allowing the other people who were now astir to fill the intervening distance. The way seemed longer than they anticipated; perhaps they were apprehensive lest their real mission should be discovered. But at last they saw the young man pause a moment, as though making sure that they would see him, and then disappear through the courtyard of a house. They walked unconcernedly past the entrance; then looking round to note if they were

free from observation, they retraced their steps, and entered the house. A man of middle age greeted them. Returning his salutations, they put the question to him, according to Christ's instructions, and immediately all need for caution was gone. They were escorted to an upper room where everything was in readiness for an expected guest. And they look round approvingly. The apartment was plain, but scrupulously clean. The low tables set in a semi-circle had rugs laid beside them, while the brazen ewer and basins standing by the door, showed that nothing had been forgotten.

"And the charge for thy so fitting accommodation shall be . . . ?" Peter had received no command about discussing this, but he desired to let this city-dweller know that his guests, although provincial, were as business-like as any in the Capital.

"Give that no thought," replied the host. "That shall be between thy Master and myself. At the evening hour, all shall be in readiness for His coming, and none more welcome than He to my roof."

Only part of their commission had been executed, for there were other preparations to make. It was late in the afternoon when the two rejoined their companions. Jesus seemed unusually quiet. They learned that He had been away for some time, ranging the slopes of Olivet as though He desired solitude. Yet that struck them as rather remarkable considering the opportunity the densely crowded city gave of reaching the multitude. Yet if they ascribed it to His dislike of the ovation His presence might evoke, or even to sheer weariness, they were mistaken. There was a deeper reason. The

lights were beginning to twinkle from the casements as the company wended its way through the falling gloom to the Capital. The great Temple itself was enfolded with the purple draperies of night. But it was so cool now, a refreshing breeze blowing from the uplands as though the air were shaken by seraphic wings, that walking was a pleasure. Still, had it not been that the Saviour seemed set on keeping the Passover within the city, they would have preferred to remain at Bethany. Peter and John were in front with Jesus. They knew the way. The others followed more or less querulously. Had the Master gone earlier when the people were about, the enthusiasm which had heralded His previous visit might have been rekindled. Something definite might have been accomplished. But they had noticed the same thing before. Jesus never seemed to regard the trend of events and the chance of winning men's loyalty!

This was the mood in which eventually the disciples reached their destination. They found that the two had exceeded their expectations, for the arrangements left little to be desired. The spacious room, the air of quiet and coolness, made an agreeable impression, and grudgingly enough they admitted to one another that perhaps it were better to be there than at Bethany. At least they would not be worried with Lazarus's friends. The ewer stood suggestively by the door, though none permitted himself to see it. Each was intent on who should secure the seat of honour next to Christ. And the fact that they were tired after a long day, coupled with the lingering resentment that Peter and John had been entrusted with preparing the

feast, must be taken into account. We are all apt to feel aggrieved when honours pass us by, and others no more deserving than ourselves receive them. So we can make some allowance for the unseemly wrangle for the chief seats which followed. Jesus did not seem to notice it; if He did, He passed no remark. But they were recalled to the solemnity of the occasion by hearing Him say, a few moments later, "With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." His meaning was not quite clear; He was often rather enigmatical in what He said. How was He going to suffer? If He were contemplating some hostility on the part of His foes, that did not cause them undue anxiety. He had proved too much for them before; He could defeat them again. But they take their places sullenly, if not shamefacedly. Then there is a further surprise as the ill-disguised dislikes are still muttered. The Master rose, and walked to the door. At first they thought He intended to leave the room until their resentment died down. Yet when they saw Him lay aside His robes, and gird a towel about His waist, they understood. The water uttered its mild protest as it gurgled into the basin. He bore it quietly back to where His disciples were reclining, and commencing at one end of the semi-circle, He began to wash and dry the feet of each of them.

They submitted in silence. Then as He came to the centre, they heard Peter indignantly exclaim, "Thou shalt never wash my feet!" It was the old, impetuous Simon. Yet when he learned that unless he agreed it meant that he had neither part nor lot with his Master, he cried, "Lord, not my feet only,

but also my hands and my head." In due course it was the turn of Judas. If anything could have recalled him to a sense of right and duty, surely the touch of those sacred hands ought. Jesus knew the traitorous errand on which they had already been. He knew how swiftly they would run the paths of dishonour, ending in death. Yet there was no hesitation on His part; only the tragic sorrow of unrequited love. Then replacing His robes, and taking His seat again, Jesus told them the meaning of His act. He had given them a concrete example which was to be their inspiration for coming days. It is not what men eagerly grasp that exalts the soul. Neither by strategy nor aggressive self-seeking is real greatness achieved. Only through humility comes honour, and by lowly service prompted by love is life made noble in God's sight.

The prescribed customs of the Passover had been modified by the passing years. The head of the family usually filled a wine cup for each one, pronouncing a blessing over it. The hands were then rinsed, and a dish of herbs, the unleavened bread, together with the paschal lamb, were then brought in. The Charoseth, a conserve of fruits, symbolized the clay with which as slaves their fathers had wrought. A second cup of wine was the signal for the youngest present to ask the meaning of the feast they celebrated. And to this the other would reply, giving details of the deliverance from Egypt. Part of the Hallel was then sung, followed by a third cup. While a fourth, with the rest of the Hallel and the blessing, concluded the ceremony. This indicates the probable order which the disciples observed that night, but there was a new and

deeper significance attached to it. When Jesus broke the bread, He placed a portion of bitter herbs with each morsel, saying, "This is My body which is broken for you." And as He passed them the cup, He quietly said, "This cup is the new testament in My blood."

A hush fell on the company. Every eye was fixed on Christ's face. For a moment, His heart seemed swept with the turgid waters of grief. Then He began to speak plainly of the danger lurking even at that table. One actually present would so far forget the demands of honour as to betray a friend with whom he had eaten. Even the restraints of sacred fellowship, and the bonds which love might have forged, would not keep him from his dastardly object. And consternation was written on every face. If the foundations of the house in which they sat had been shaken by an earthquake, they could not have been more astonished. The traitor was abashed because his nefarious schemes seemed to have been discovered; the rest were astounded because the threatened calamity lay not in the gloom outside, but within the hallowed circle itself. Whom could Jesus mean? Peter signalled to John, sitting next to the Master, to ascertain who it was, and Christ answered the whispered question by handing a morsel of food to the treacherous Judas. While that act means little to us, Judas knew its significance. It was the way by which a host showed favour to one of his guests. In this case it was Christ's last appeal to any shred of chivalry and loyalty remaining in that sordid soul. Evidently the identity of the traitor was not fully disclosed to the others, or Judas would scarcely have

left that room alive. With all their failings, the Apostles loved their Master. That is proved by the repugnance with which the mention of betrayal was received by them all. When Christ bade the traitor proceed quickly with his evil purpose, he was glad to escape from those reproachful eyes, and he went forth on what the disciples construed into some errand for the Master. Only two knew the real object of his going: Jesus and himself.

The whole company breathed more freely. They did not know why. It was as though a cloud had passed from the face of the sun, and brightness and warmth reappeared. Christ seemed to feel the same thing. While He warned His friends of coming trial, and of defection that would bring sorrow to Him and shame to them, His heart was filled with love like the brimming wine cups which had passed from hand to hand. Simon was singled out for special counsel, and the earnest voice of the Saviour urged him to that finer loyalty in which he might also be the encourager of his brethren. Slowly the idea began to shape itself in their minds: Jesus was leaving them. Peter's vehement assurances awaken no interest. Numb with grief and regrets for the past, they listen awed and solemnized. Christ's tenderness is immeasurable. "Let not your heart be troubled"—that is the keynote of the parting hour. The promise of the Comforter follows, and the hope held out that they shall be united again. It is only partly comprehended, yet memory is kind. When the poignancy of that experience passed, like a sun-dial, it marked the hours of spiritual privilege.

Such are the influences emanating from that Up-

per Room. But we turn now to seek the identity of this man who gave Jesus the use of his guest-chamber. Keim held that it may have been Joseph of Arimathæa; others favour Simon the Leper. Ewald's theory that we have a clue in the story of the early church is better founded. There is reference to a young man, living with his widowed mother in Jerusalem. They threw open their house to the Apostles, and in an upper chamber of it, the Christians met for prayer and mutual counsel. That young man was John Mark, the evangelist. Possibly his father was this devout admirer of Jesus. And what is more likely than that, when a messenger was needed to bring word that the Master intended to celebrate the Passover under that roof, he should be taken into his father's confidence? It would be he who went to the spring, for Christ's secret could not be entrusted to a servant. He would thus know the honour that came to his home, and the memories of that night would be ineffaceable. Later he became the intimate friend of Peter, the man he met that day, and had no small share in the Apostle's work. We shall discuss this more fully in our next chapter. Meanwhile we allow the suggestion to stand.

How much flowed from the simple act of generosity shown by the good man of the house. He had laid his plans only for that one evening; the influence of those hours will abide until eternity itself. That room saw not only the sublime deed of Jesus, washing His disciples' feet, but also the institution of that memorial feast, bridging the centuries, and binding His followers of every time and clime, into a holy fellowship of faith. While the

tender cadence of those farewell words, recorded in the fourteenth of John, echo like heavenly harmonies in a weary world. In that room the glorious vision of the Risen Lord broke on their eyes. And like a noble stream, born and cradled among the towering hills, the Christian Church took its rise at Pentecost.

Men gather from all quarters of the globe to visit an unpretentious house in Stratford-on-Avon, where in an upper room, the "myriad-minded Shakespeare" was born. Others trace with difficulty a narrow street in Bonn, where in a tiny chamber under the eaves Beethoven first saw the light. They go with reverent feet to a house in Tenth Street, Washington, where Lincoln was borne after the assassin's bullet laid him low, and where the fires which glowed in that great soul slowly sank to ashes. Did the good man of the house who succoured the stricken President foresee how many would rise up and call him blessed? No more than he who proffered the hospitality of his humble roof to the Son of God.

We reach this striking fact: the lowliest service rendered for Christ's sake may have stupendous results. The simplest deed of kindness may be invested with unfading lustre. This unnamed resident of Jerusalem did a great thing without knowing it. Yet its greatness is none the less real. He acted well within his capacity; there was no nerving of the heart for some gigantic task. Except for the danger of harbouring the Nazarene it cost him little. And for us to place our resources at the command of Christ and His cause, to give the welcome of the home-circle to one who might be swept into the eddying currents of temptation, to extend a helping hand or the heart's sympathy to some soul in

straits, may achieve incalculable good. Gray missed part of the truth when he affirmed:

> "Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
> And waste its sweetness on the desert air."

The bare truth is that the whole world is the sweeter for its life. Its fragrance helps to make the earth glad, while its beauty forms part of the colour-scheme of the universe. So it is with the consecrated soul. It may possess few gifts. It may lack much by way of brilliance or genius. Yet to use wisely and lavishly what God puts within our power, to use it from the highest of all motives, is to enable the Father to work out His purpose of good for mankind.

An old Scots minister toiled on amid much discouragement. No signs of success gladdened his heart. And though his people were indulgent up to a point, he felt his work was a failure. One day, however, a youth came shyly to speak with him. He had been moved by the simple preaching of this saintly man, and asked if he too might one day qualify himself for the holy ministry. The old man listened with sympathy and understanding; had he not faced a similar issue himself long ago? He advised the youth as best he could. He set his feet in the way of preparation, and aided him with his studies. Then he saw him set out for Africa, called by God to the "other sheep" of Christ's fold. With such power and success did that missionary labour that eventually the world rang with his praises. It remembers his name even to this day. Robert Moffatt stands in the front rank of courageous pioneers

of the Kingdom. But the name of the godly man who helped him to climb the ladder of glorious achievement has passed into oblivion.

Multitudes have been inspired by Christ to care for the loveless and despairing. And they, as Lowell finely puts it,

> ". . . Thread to-day the unheeding street,
> And stairs to sin and famine known,
> Sing with the welcome of their feet;
> The den they enter grows a shrine,
> The grimy sash an oriel burns,
> Their cup of water warms like wine,
> Their speech is filled from heavenly urns."

To all this does the good man of the house direct our minds. We realize with new intensity that the mainspring of his action was his love of the highest when he saw it. With eyes as discerning as those of the merchant seeking goodly pearls, he found the Pearl of great price. He saw the beauty of Christ's matchless life, and feeling its spell, he surrendered to it in lowly and adoring reverence. Whoever he was, this unknown disciple made the world his debtor by providing a suitable setting for the greatest masterpiece of redemptive love man has ever beheld. He has done more, giving us an example worthy of emulation, for he is an outstanding figure in that company known only to the Almighty Himself:

> ". . . That did their deed
> And scorned to blot it with a name,
> Men of the plain heroic breed,
> Who loved Heaven's silence more than fame."

IV

THE OWNER OF THE GARDEN

"He went forth with His disciples over the brook Kidron, where was a garden."
—JOHN 18:1.

FEW scenes have laid hold of the mind with such force as those of the Upper Room and Gethsemane. Imagination has pictured those hours in fullest detail. Having sung the hymn, Christ and His friends softly move out from that place of tender parting. The Saviour casts a lingering look round the apartment, and catching a glimpse of a figure standing by the portal, He pauses. It is His host, and He thanks him for the timely hospitality. Then the company fares forth. The hour is late, and the night strangely still. The city is wrapped in slumber, for the pilgrims are tired with their journey. Moreover, the morrow would be a wonderful day, and they would fain enjoy every hour of it. Only the distant barking of a dog or two disturbs the silence, except for the whispering of the night winds through the trees.

The company is in no mood for conversation, though Jesus takes the opportunity of adding a few words of encouragement and counsel as they walk. But now the narrow path leading to the Kidron is reached, and they stretch out in twos and singly,

towards the place where the garden lies, a black patch in the moonlight, on the farther side of the stream. Why did Jesus seek that spot at this hour? The disciples were tired out. The experiences of that evening had added to the strain of the day, and they would have gladly stayed in that room to snatch a few hours' sleep. Peter and the sons of Zebedee may have suspected the reason. If there was any chance of Judas divulging Christ's rendezvous with His disciples, it was like Jesus to withdraw from a house which had given Him shelter, so that His host might not be involved. He did not wish such a man to be submitted to indignities or insult on His account. Yet out there, in the silent garden, they might elude their enemies, and at daybreak they could get back to Bethany and then home to the north.

That may have been their explanation; it was not Christ's reason for going there. He knew what lay before Him. He longed for solitude, for the city could not give Him what He sought. The walls seemed to shut Him in, making it difficult to commune with the Unseen. Besides, with the fresh night winds playing about Him, with the indigo vault bright with its gleaming points of light spreading over His head, He might the better realize the Divine presence.

> "A garden is a lovesome thing, God wot!
> Rose plot, fringed pool; ferned grot—
> The veriest school of peace; and yet the fool
> Contends that God is not.
> Not God! in gardens, when the eve is cool?
> Nay, but I have a sign;
> 'Tis very sure God walks in mine."

The shadows lie deep as the company passes through the trees. With gracious solicitude for those who had been, on the whole, so staunch and true, who had endured the fatigue of the day for His sake, Jesus bids them rest. "Sit ye here while I go and pray yonder." But turning to the three who had been closest to Him, He asks them to accompany Him a little way farther. They have proved the most discerning of the Twelve, and He feels the need of human sympathy as well as of Divine solace in that dread hour. "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here and watch with Me." He sees them settle themselves with their backs against the trees, and then moving away a few paces, kneels to pray. The redemptive mission on which He had come is now reaching its culmination. The bitterness of His cup none but He could know. It was not the fear of death, nor of the excruciating agonies of crucifixion from which He shrank. There was a significance in His sacrifice that no mind can probe. He, the sinless One, was voluntarily identified with stricken and sinning humanity. The grief which its waywardness caused to God was laid on Him. And He was to reveal the Divine love for the lost by a unique sacrifice inspired by the Eternal Himself.

The moon throws a pattern of fretted silver through the grove. Its light falls on the uplifted face, showing the agony through which the Saviour of the world is passing. As He prays aloud, a few sentences are carried to the ears of the three, and their hearts swell with sympathy. But these men are also weary. The day has been exacting, and

nature will have her way. The rustling leaves, the hint of perfume from the sleeping flowers, and the scent of the olive trees, lull them to sleep. Then they feel the touch of a hand; it is Jesus. They bestir themselves, confident they had closed their eyes only for a minute. One of them had declared his willingness to die for his Lord, and perhaps Christ's words conveyed more to him than to the other two. "What, could ye not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray!" And a second time He goes forward to lift His burdened soul to the Infinite. Returning later, He finds all three fast asleep again, but He understands their weariness, and for the third time withdraws. His agony is intense. The perspiration forms in great beads on the sacred face, and there comes one to minister to the Son of God.

Suddenly the three awaken. Jesus stands before them, and they hear Him saying, "Sleep on, now, and take your rest: behold the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners." They know what has roused them. It was not Christ's voice. The gleam of lanterns and torches, the noise of feet stumbling through the undergrowth in spite of attempts at secrecy, suggest danger. "Betrayed?" Peter jumped to his feet at the word. Not if he could prevent it! He understood it all now. That scheming villain, Judas, warmed like a viper in the Master's breast, had followed expecting to find them asleep. Doubtless he hoped to take Jesus unawares, but he would discover his mistake. And as Peter reasoned, he recognized the form of Iscariot separating from the rest.

With a kiss of salutation he took his stand by the Master's side as though it were just the most natural thing to do.

"Friend, wherefore art thou come?" Peter listened amazed. Did not Christ perceive this fellow's hypocrisy? Now, if He had said, "Fiend!" . . . Peter was sure of treachery, and as another stepped forward to seize Christ's wrist, his sword leapt out. He dealt the fellow a swinging blow which would have cloven his skull had he not veered swiftly aside. As it was, the man's ear was almost severed. But Christ, pausing first to heal the wound, turned to the emissaries of the priests. Why had they come out against Him with staves as though He were a common malefactor? Violence was unnecessary. If they sought to arrest Him, then His friends should be allowed to leave without hindrance. Probably the Apostles had also been taken prisoners, but Christ's intervention was effectual, and they took immediate refuge in flight. Meanwhile, a scuffle was going on in another part of the garden. Some of the more alert among the guards had caught a glimpse of a white garment, and set out to investigate. Cautiously approaching the spot, they came on a youth, partly hidden in a hollow, and screened by the overhanging branches. They pounced on him, but he was too quick. Slipping out of the garment they seized, he fled, leaving it in their hands.

The weird scene has ended. The sound of footsteps dies away. The strange stillness of the garden is intensified, even as its darkness, now that the torches no longer gleam. We linger alone under those dim arches, deep questions rising in our hearts.

We know why Jesus came here, but who was it that gave Him permission and to whom did the garden belong? Who invited Him to use it as a retreat from the blistering heat of day, and as an oratory by night? The questions are not of primary importance, except that everything concerning Christ is of interest to us. The answers are linked with what has gone before. Perhaps the young man who escaped from his captors might be able to solve the mystery. Who was he, and why had he come to the same place?

As we have pointed out, the information at our disposal indicates the father of John Mark as the owner of the guest-chamber. He was a man of substance. His house was near Gethsemane, just across the Kidron, and what is more probable than that he also was the proprietor of this olive grove? Standing on the slopes of Olivet, his industry would be carried on in this plot of land. Perhaps he had become familiar with the figure of Jesus, teaching in the Temple on some earlier occasion, and seeing Him pausing for rest beneath the shady trees bordering the estate, this man had given Jesus a standing invitation to use his olive garden whenever He wished. So it became Christ's favourite resort when in the neighbourhood. But how can we determine whether this was indeed Mark's father or not? We have only to look in another direction for our warrant. It will be recalled that Paul's companion on one of his missionary tours was Barnabas, who took with him his nephew, John Mark. For some reason, the latter did not complete the journey, and he afterwards became the associate of Peter, whose acquaintance, we suggest, he had made before that

memorable Passover. The Gospel of Mark enshrines Peter's recollections of the Saviour's life, and a tradition which can be traced as far back as Papias describes Mark as the *hermeneutes* of the Apostle—his interpreter or amanuensis. Certainly, the two were on the most intimate terms, and Peter speaks of him as "my son."

This is even more striking: It is only in Mark's account of what occurred in the garden that the attempted capture of the young man is narrated. Even then it seems so trivial and irrelevant that it is surprising to find it included in the story of Christ's arrest. The explanation is that it was of the greatest interest, at any rate, to the writer himself. Moreover, a tradition current in the early Church was that Mark was known as the "Stump-fingered." We piece these details together. If it were the son of the good man of the house who met the disciples at the spring, he would be filled with curiosity regarding this wondrous Galilæan. The mysterious arrangements and the secret conclave in the upper room, would appeal to the youthful mind. And when he saw the party disperse after the meal, he followed to see what was about to happen. He knew every inch of the garden. Concealing himself among the trees, and recalling some of the grave hints his father had let fall, he waited there, an unseen spectator.

No thoughtful reader of the Gospels can study the accounts of that hour without being puzzled about another matter. If the disciples were all asleep while Jesus prayed, how was it that they knew the burden of His petitions? His words are recorded. Further, we are told that He repeated

the plea that the cup might be allowed to pass, and the great prayer set forth in the seventeenth of John is also preserved. Admittedly, some of our Lord's supplications were heard by the three; but there can be little doubt that they later availed themselves of another source of information for some of their particulars. Our only ground for the theory is its reasonable probability, but we affirm that their informant must have been John Mark.

Again, why was he called Stump-fingered? The chances are that in the mêlée his thumb was severed by a knife. He could not conceal the matter from his family. The father might upbraid him, while secretly proud of his son's part in that night's events. And when he later became attached to the Apostles, he would admit the share he had been permitted to take. His personal knowledge of what Christ endured, would also add to his prestige. When in after days he came to write the stories which Peter related to frequent audiences, giving them order and sequence, we can understand why he inserted this incident which marked the beginning of his discipleship.

But it is hard to imagine what were his feelings as he listened to the Man of Sorrows in that hour. Yet that experience made an indelible impression on his young soul. The example of his parents had already prepared the way for that reverence with which he came to regard Jesus. While parental influence is at a discount in the present day, more may be wrought by it than can be demonstrated. The love Christ inspired in the soul of Mark's father, the veneration with which Jesus was regarded in that home, helped to shape the plastic

soul of the youth. And as we can see, beyond all argument, the first links in the golden chain which made John Mark the slave of Jesus Christ, were forged at home.

Hazlitt has an illuminating passage on the effect of one noble soul upon another. "To be dazzled by admiration of the greatest excellence, and of the highest works of genius," he says, "is natural to the best capacities and the best natures; envy and dulness are most apt to detect minute blemishes and unavoidable inequalities, as we see the spots on the sun by having its rays blunted by mist and smoke. . . . To admire and to be wrapped up in what is trifling and absurd, is a proof of nothing but ignorance or affectation: on the contrary, he who admires most what is most worthy of admiration (let his raptures or his eagerness to express them be what they may) shows himself neither extravagant nor unwise. The highest taste is shown in habitual sensibility to the greatest beauties; the most general taste is shown in a perception of the greatest variety of excellence."

And so the owner of the garden and the guest-chamber, in his veneration for Christ, did not fail of his reward. He gave, unwittingly yet nevertheless really, a valiant soldier to Christ's cause. That was so because Jesus makes such a forceful appeal to the young heart. At a certain stage of development, it responds to the heroic and chivalrous with amazing facility. Is not that just what Carlyle so vehemently held forth? "Great men, taken up in any way, are profitable company. We cannot look, however imperfectly, upon a great man without gaining something by him. He is the living light-foun-

tain, which it is good and pleasant to be near. The light which enlightens and which has enlightened the darkness of the world; and this, not as a kindled lamp only, but rather as a natural luminary shining by the gift of Heaven; a flowing light-fountain, as I say, of native, original insight, of manhood and heroic nobleness;—in whose radiance all souls feel that it is well with them."

Mark is proof of those words. And to the youth of the present day we need to hold up anew the example of the kingliest of men, the most chivalrous of leaders—Jesus Christ. We have over-emphasized the lowliness of His life to the exclusion of the loftiness of His character. Too often we have imparted a concept of "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild," and have omitted the majesty of His superb manhood, His self-control in face of persecution, the valorous courage that marked the hour of His trial and apparent defeat. Gentle He is, but He is also great and glorious. And as the "Strong Son of God" whom Tennyson hymns, the young heart may adore Him.

Nor must we fail to note the eternal value of Mark's humble duty which served to open the way to the high track of Christ's service. Had he declined the menial task assigned that morning, fearing to become the butt of his friends' jests, he would have missed his title to greatness. We might well ask:

"Wouldst thou be a hero? Wait not then supinely
For fields of fair romance that no day brings;
The finest work oft lies in doing finely
A multitude of unromantic things."

Familiar though the words, they may be re-minted as current coin: "Do the duty which lies nearest thee, which thou knowest to be a duty. The second duty will already have become clearer. . . . The situation that has not its duty, its ideal, was never yet occupied by man. Yes, here in this poor, miserable, hampered actual, wherein thou even now standest, here or nowhere is thy ideal: work it out therefrom; and working, believe, live, and be free."

V

FACES AROUND THE FIRE

"When they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them."

—LUKE 22 : 55.

THE trial before Annas was still in progress when Peter took his seat by the fire. What could have possessed him to venture there? Many explanations have been attempted; they must all prove inadequate because no one can be sure of all the factors which determine conduct. The four Evangelists describe the scene, and even Mark does not minimize the gravity of Peter's downfall. Yet the object of the writers is not to disparage Simon; it is rather that succeeding generations might profit by his saddening and humiliating experience. He had been so self-reliant, so egotistical. He says, not without a touch of impatience and pride, "Though all forsake Thee, yet will not I." But when the wave of panic swept over those in the garden, Peter, notwithstanding his one flash of courage, was no more valiant than the rest.

That may have had something to do with his presence in that circle round the fire. After the arrest, Jesus was hurried away for trial. It all happened so suddenly that the disciples had scarcely time to realize what had occurred. And while the

band led its Prisoner back to the city, the terror-stricken disciples made their escape by the other side of the enclosure. Peter had run blindly forwards in the darkness, making his way through the undergrowth, until he emerged at last on a track leading to Jerusalem. Then he stopped, breathless. The incriminating sword had been flung away. But now he almost wished he had kept it. It was not that he had any definite idea in mind, though if the others had been at hand, one so impetuous might have attempted the rescue of Jesus. That was now out of the question. And though he could endeavour to justify himself, he knew that he had played an inglorious part, even as those with whom he had compared himself shortly before. He felt impelled to act; yet what to do he could not decide. Resuming his walk, Peter found himself near the Temple. The casements of Annas were bright, and instinctively Peter knew that Jesus must be there. He was at the mercy of His foes!

If only he could gain admittance, and learn what was going on! But how? Even though the others had remained faithful, they could not hope to prevail against the High Priest's bodyguard.

"And yet, is not one Galilæan fisher equal to a score of these town-bred hirelings?" he mused. "Could I but set these fingers of mine about their throats . . ."

Footsteps were approaching, and Peter drew back into the shadow. All his courageous resolves melted away as he waited. Then he started. It was John, the son of Zebedee! He was manifestly startled as Peter stepped out. He stopped, and then asked in a subdued voice:

"What doest thou here? Whither didst thou flee? I have been searching for the others also, but none can be found."

Peter flung up his beard with a touch of contempt. "Those are questions I could ask of thee. But enough; tell me where thou goest."

John pointed to the palace. "To the house of the High Priest."

"Thou? A bosom friend of thine is in the seat of power, perchance?" It was the well-known Peter, and John winced at the sarcasm.

"This is no time for pleasantries, nor for barbed words which wound," he replied sadly. "It is nevertheless true that I am known to some of the household. Zebedee, my father, hath long had dealings with them and so I have often been there in times past. It may be that even if we cannot do aught for Him we love, at least we may learn their designs concerning Him. I have even thought that I might intercede with some of the councillors on His behalf. But that is little likely; yet I will go."

"And I go with thee."

"Thou?" John stretched forth a restraining hand.

"Aye; and why not? Am I not fit to associate with these in high places? Remember, thou also art from the Lake."

"Thou dost misconstrue my words. I meant it not in that way. But I am known to them, as I have said. My coming will not be remarked upon—I trust not! But thou art a stranger, and it might be unsafe for thee to be seen within yonder portals."

Simon Peter thrust himself forward. "That, my

brother, is not thy concern, but mine. Let me but pass within the gate with thee as thy friend or one known to thee, and my blood shall be upon my own head."

Seeing that further argument was useless, John consented, and they made their way to the house of Annas. The wicket was drawn back in response to John's knock, and the portress lifting her lamp to scan the face without, and surprised to see the handsome young fisher who had not been there for so long, readily admitted him. He made some excuse for his companion, and rather reluctantly, she allowed Peter to pass. Once inside, John whispered that it would be unwise, even foolhardy, for Peter to venture farther, but promised if he would wait his return, he would ascertain if there was any hope of aiding their Lord. That indicates how little he understood Peter's temperament. Peter could not remain inactive. To stand passive in the shadows, waiting for another to bring the tidings which he so urgently desired, was not the part for which he was fitted. Why should he wait in abject submission to John when he might glean some information for himself? The air was chill, but one who was accustomed to sail the waters of Galilee all night long, and who had also been a disciple of Him who often had "not where to lay His head," would not be unduly susceptible to cold. But others were less inured to the night. Peter noticed them from his place of concealment. They had lit a fire in a brazier in the outer court, and with hands held out to the welcome glow, he could see them talking together animatedly. What the subject was he could well surmise. They evidently knew something of

what was transpiring, and the only way to avail himself of their information was to join them at the fire. It was foolish for John to urge caution, as though he were the only one who could act discreetly! And Peter sauntered towards the group.

Rubbing his hands, like one chilled to the bone, he threw a careless glance of acknowledgment as they stood aside to let him draw near. For an instant, silence reigned. Prattling about a matter of priestly intrigue, as children love to discuss their elders, was one thing among themselves; it was another when a man who might be an informer joined their company uninvited. Peter was at a loss. This had not entered into his calculations. But while trying to devise some means of ingratiating himself with those about him, he was aware that room was being made for some one else to get to the fire. It was the woman who had admitted John and himself! She held her cold fingers to the blaze, which lighting up her face, showed the softly-rounded features, and the wisps of hair which floated over her brow. Then turning her gaze on the weather-tanned face of the sailor, on which robust hardihood sat enthroned, she smiled approvingly. Nor was it without effect. Peter was conscious of the admiration in her look. It was a relief to one under such tension to see a friendly face. With some word about the fatigue of her long duties, and the comfort of a handful of fire on such a night, Peter relaxed his guard.

There is a passage in Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* which bears on Peter's need of vigilance. "I was much followed by this Scripture, 'Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you.' And some-

times it would sound so loud within me, yea, and as it were call so strongly after me, that once above all the rest, I turned my head over my shoulder, thinking verily that some man behind me had called me. . . . It came, as I have thought since, to have stirred me up to prayer and to watchfulness. It came to acquaint me that a cloud and storm were coming down upon me." But Peter's nature demanded companionship, and this woman seemed friendly enough. She was not displeased to find that her attractiveness was not lost on the stranger, and as Mark's narrative leads us to suppose, more in raillery than anything else, she said to Peter, "Thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth." Instead of the bantering reply she expected, giving the chance of a little coquetry on her part, he bridled up instantly. "I know not, neither understand what thou sayest." The maid flushed. She had not anticipated this. It had been said innocently enough, and as far as she knew, there was nothing to which any sensible man could take exception. Yet it was plain that, though she had drawn a bow at a venture, she had scored a palpable hit, and Peter stalked angrily away.

We now see the faces round the fire even better. They are all animation again. Peter's withdrawal has not only removed the need for reticence, but has also given new material for discussion. They eagerly questioned the girl as to his identity, and how he had gained admittance. And while she could tell them but little—that he had come in with one who formerly had business with the steward of the household,—they were free to draw their own conclusions. The proceedings in the court of Annas

were very mysterious, and these men were naturally curious. The turn of events gave them a new interest in the affair, for here was one of the prime actors in this drama within reach. The dull hours of waiting were given promise of enlivenment. Peter had unwillingly revealed what he was most anxious to conceal. His sudden resentment at the woman's taunt roused suspicions that would not lightly be laid to rest. And Peter knew it as well as those who heard his emphatic denial. Resolving to appear as though it were unimportant, he turned again to the fire. If he could have escaped from the courtyard without detection, he would have done so; but within that fateful circle, he knew he must brave the matter out.

Presently his composure returned. None of the men took any apparent notice of him. They talked quietly among themselves of things in general as though Peter did not exist. And he commenced to wonder how he might carry his former plans into effect. John was nowhere in sight. If anything was to be done, he must do it himself. But even while he was turning the matter over in his mind his heart sank. Another woman approached. Peter could see by the glint in her eyes that she had something to impart. Evidently her fellow-servant had been talking to her, and she had been dared to make another attack on the adventurous fisherman. He met her gaze as she looked first into his face, and then slowly surveyed him from head to foot. There was more than a hint of insolence in her manner, and Peter was about to make some scathing comment, when suddenly the girl wheeled round to those who were closely watching her. Pointing an accus-

ing finger at the man before her, she said firmly, "This is one of them."

It was more than the Apostle could stand. He had fought to keep control of the temper which threatened to master him. Now he could contain himself no longer. He forgot all his protestations of loyalty. His one object was to escape from the snare. Denial again leapt to his lips. The accusations of another bystander were met in similar fashion. Fighting with his back to the wall, Peter flung every thought except that of self-preservation to the winds, and lie followed lie with facility. The tumult died down. His better self was in revolt, but it had no means of making its protests heard, and it must wait for a more convenient season.

An hour passed. There was no sign of the trial terminating. Peter looked longingly at the gate through which he had entered, yet though he was apparently free to go when he chose, he knew that the moment he tried to leave, he would be set upon. What should he do? He was in a quandary. He had ventured there, bent on recovering his lost self-esteem; instead he had fallen still farther down the slippery slopes of the abyss. He had been resolved on action; instead he was doomed to inaction. It had become almost intolerable when a new-comer appeared in the light of the fire. He had been in attendance on the court, and now seeing some of his friends around the brazier, he joined them. A few whispered words, and he turned his scrutiny upon the stranger's face. It so happened that this man was a kinsman of Malchus. He too had been present at the arrest, and had witnessed Peter's

savage onslaught. As a kinsman of the wounded fellow he had vowed vengeance. The torches showed him his man, and memory had stored the impression away in the gallery of the unforgettable. Fortune had now placed his enemy in his power. A cruel smile played round his face as he looked at Peter, and demanded, "Did I not see thee with Him in the garden?" Peter's blood ran cold. There was no mistaking the tones. The net was being drawn about his feet. He tried to force a laugh as he reiterated his ignorance of the whole matter, when he received a further blow from another quarter. "Surely thou art one of them: for thou art a Galilæan, and thy speech agreeth thereto." He was ensnared.

The fact that he was a Galilæan was inconclusive. There were numerous pilgrims from the northern province who had come to Jerusalem for the Passover, and they were easily recognizable. Their accent was peculiar, for the difficulty they found in pronouncing some of the gutturals made a marked difference between their mode of speech and the polished tones of the capital. So there are more ways than one by which a man may reveal himself. Appearances are proverbially deceptive, though Peter had been seen with Jesus. But he revealed his real self not only in what he said, but also by the way in which he said it. Tennyson's well-known lines admit that the spoken word gives only a hint of personality:

> "For words, like Nature, half reveal
> And half conceal the soul within."

The firm denial with which Peter met the first charge might have convinced some. But others felt that he had taken a playful taunt too seriously, and he did protest too much! That was the more evident when challenged a second time. His growing concern and discomfort under the relentless eyes of his antagonists were indisputable when once he began to buttress his position with oaths and curses. And here the old self came to the fore. His tones showed the Galilæan, and his frenzy one who had completely lost self-control. The habit acquired amid the rough fishermen, when the nets fouled or the wind became contrary, re-asserted itself, and his real self stood naked to those curious eyes.

Then all Peter's faith, his stout promises of fidelity, his professed love for Christ, amounted to nothing? He was yet unregenerate? Not so. Without condoning his sad failure or minimizing his wrong-doing, we seek to explain his fall that we ourselves may be warned. Note the successive steps. He began with self-assertiveness that soon led to self-praise. Peter had an unfortunate way of measuring himself, not with the perfect life of Jesus, but by the imperfect standards of his fellow-disciples. Excusable though it may have been for him at that stage of his development, it had fatal results. Self-commendation was followed by undue reliance upon himself and the qualities with which he was endowed, and he commenced to plume himself unduly upon his invincible strength of will. Self-reliance is a sterling quality, but it must be jealously guarded lest it deteriorate into stupid dis-

regard of those dangers which are never far from the soul. Its correlative virtue is reliance upon God. Edinburgh Castle was captured only once in its long history, and then it was not by direct assault, but by strategy. It was not on its accessible side, but where it was thought to be impregnable. Under cover of darkness, the foe scaled the precipitous rocks on which the fortress is perched, and the position was taken. The same thing was true of Wolfe's attack on Quebec. The garrison carefully manned every vulnerable point in the defences, but under cover of night and with muffled oars, Wolfe's force crossed the St. Lawrence above the stronghold. Then drifting noiselessly downstream, they disembarked at the foot of the Heights of Abraham. They crept up the rock-face, nerved to keep their precarious foothold only by the courage of their intrepid leader. Slowly mustering on the craggy eminence, at daybreak they launched their furious attack on the defenders, who, taken by surprise, found their valiant resistance unavailing, and the victory was won.

Peter's defence was woefully inadequate. His fall was equally humiliating. No one realized it more than he. He would have given his life to recall those words almost as soon as they had left his lips. Yet so far had he been driven by bombastic pride that, in lies and oaths, he had to cover his shameful retreat. There had been a lack of vigilance. He had allowed himself to get out of touch with Jesus Christ, and so defeat resulted. In Kipling's *Plain Tales from the Hills* we find that which, in part, explains Peter's defeat.

"It was not in the open fight
We threw away the sword,
But in the lonely watching
In the darkness by the ford.

"The waters lapped, the night-wind blew,
Full-armed the Fear was born and grew,
And we were flying ere we knew
From Panic in the night."

Meanwhile the company round the brazier saw a defeated soul, and they exulted in the fact that they were no longer mere passive onlookers at that hour of destiny. Perhaps there were some who had misgivings. For instance, the maid who had twitted Peter about his friendship for Jesus had no idea what her words would entail. And we might pass her over as an unconscious accessory to Peter's downfall but for one fact: untold mischief is often done by irresponsible chatter. Her feelings can be imagined as she looked at the remorseful face of this strong man. Yet regret could not undo the harm she had done.

It is related that a woman, from whose faculty for gossip no reputation was safe, was at last brought to book by her parish priest. He undertook to teach her a lesson. As penance for her wrong-doing, she was ordered to take a hundred small feathers, and to drop them one by one as she walked from one milestone to the next. That did not seem an irksome task. But on her return, she was to collect them again, and to count them out before her spiritual adviser. A woe-begone figure stood before the austere man some hours later. She had only a few feathers to show, for the wind sprang up as

she walked, and many of the feathers had gone. "You see, my daughter, what this means? Your words, lightly spoken, are even as the feathers you dropped by the way. They are carried far beyond hope of recovery, and find lodgment where they can never be traced." There is a warning also in Carleton's, *The First Settler's Story*. The husband had spoken harshly to his young wife about the cows which had strayed. He left in a temper, only to find on his return that she had gone forth in a violent storm to find them. Exhausted, she gets back to his door only to die, and he says:

> "Boys flying kites, haul in their white-winged birds:
> You can't do that way when you're flying words.
> 'Careful with fire' is good advice we know;
> 'Careful with words' is ten-times doubly so.
> Thoughts unexpressed may sometimes fall back dead,
> But God Himself can't kill them once they're said."

Yet Peter is not the only figure about that fire with a message for us. That friend of Malchus shows the need for a forgiving spirit. Friendship is a priceless thing; but to cherish the desire for petty revenge in friendship's name, especially when there is no just ground for it, is despicable. Malchus had been healed by Jesus. In reality, he had suffered little, and, moreover, Peter was in other hands. The fierce remorse which came to him was punishment for all his misdeeds. Robert Louis Stevenson reminds us, in his Vailima Prayers, of a better way. "Offenders ourselves, give us grace to accept and to forgive offenders." While One greater than he taught His friends to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us."

The other parties to Peter's overthrow may be dismissed with a word. They show unreasoning hostility, an officious love of fault-finding that are beneath contempt. The barbarism of a man-hunt is there, as unlovely as its modern equivalent of pulling an adversary to pieces simply because he dares to have opinions different from our own.

Yet while we escape from these who rejoiced in Peter's shame, we cannot but look again at the retreating form of the Apostle. The first stage of Christ's examination had come to an end. He had been sent in charge of the guards across the courtyard to the house of Caiaphas, and the bustle and confusion of the dispersing officials caused Peter to turn. His eyes met those of his Divine Master. Something in Christ's look melted his heart. The true man now stands revealed, for "Peter went out and wept bitterly." The tender plant of Penitence springs from the soil only under gracious influences. Had Christ unloosed the lightnings of righteous indignation upon that hapless disciple, what would have been the result? Had He upbraided him for his faithlessness, would Peter have been moved as he was? It would have meant the end of his apostolic career. All hope of better things would have been extinguished. But in Christ's face, Peter read two vital facts: What he was to Jesus, and what Jesus was to him. He had yet to traverse a lonely way. True penitence is costly indeed. But ultimately love triumphed and a worthier disciple emerged.

Hazlitt speaks of a meeting he had with Lamb, Holcroft, and Coleridge, at which the two latter were arguing which were the better—man as he

was, or man as he is to be. "Give me," said Lamb with emphasis, "man as he is *not* to be." The gentleness of Christ did more to win Peter to a better course than any severe measures could have done. While denunciations of sin may be justifiable, they seldom can sever a man from his unhappy past, or lift him to that plane of life on which the future may be redeemed. High explosives may splinter part of an iceberg; only the genial sun and the warm seas can melt it. Love is gracious in its operation, but its force is mighty. And the splendid place Peter subsequently filled was due entirely to the compassion and comprehension of Christ. The fire had done its work; the gold was refined, the dross consumed. No longer ashamed of his Master, no longer denying Him, but rather glorying in His saving grace, Peter at last came to that day when, melted by a look and captured by His love, the Risen Christ dominated his life for ever.

VI

PILATE, THE IRRESOLUTE

"When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put Him to death: and when they had bound Him, they led Him away, and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate, the governor."

—MATT. 27: 1-2.

STREAKS of gold shot across the empurpled east as Pilate went forth. He was angry—angry not only with those who had sent word that a case of great urgency was set for hearing, but also with himself that he had to do the bidding of these barbarians. Patrician as he was, he had nothing but contempt for these of plebeian stock. The representative of the conqueror, he detested the subject race over which he ruled. The air of superiority with which they always met him moved him at times almost to frenzy, for with their spurious piety, their whimsical superstitions and customs, they were constantly setting their opinions against his, and even criticizing his administration. Already there had been trouble. Bigotry and jealous regard for what they were pleased to term their rights had been at the root of it. The unreasoning prejudice in the Jewish mind against all effigies and supposedly idolatrous emblems had been, in Pilate's judgment,

weakly tolerated by Rome. Consequently, the figures of the god-emperor adorning the standards of the army were removed before they were carried into Jerusalem. Pilate who was appointed by Tiberius in A.D. 26, determined soon after he took office to break down this opposition. He ordered that the standards should be borne into the city just as they were, though he took the precaution of seeing that it was done by night. The outcry which followed amazed him. The fanatical people pleaded and wept. He resolved to cure their stupidity, and his soldiers surrounded the crazed company with the object of terrorizing the people. But they prostrated themselves before the drawn swords, ready to be martyred rather than abandon their protest. They were obdurate. And Pilate's tactlessness was followed by acquiescence which was interpreted as weakness. The standards were withdrawn, and taken back to Cæsarea; the people had won. Another incident shows a similar thing. He had planned to build an aqueduct for the city. This was laudable enough in itself. But the governor's mistake was, however, that he sought to meet the cost not from the imperial exchequer, not even from additional taxation, but from the funds of the Temple.

Anatole France makes Pilate describe it to his friend, Lamia, in this way: "When for my sins I was appointed governor of Judæa, I conceived the idea of furnishing Jerusalem with an abundant supply of pure water by means of an aqueduct. . . . The architects and the workmen had their instructions. I gave orders for the commencement of operations. But far from viewing with satisfaction the construction of that conduit, which was intended

to carry to their town upon its massive arches not only water, but health, the inhabitants of Jerusalem gave vent to lamentable outcries. They gathered tumultuously together, exclaiming against the sacrilege and impiousness, and hurling themselves upon the workmen, scattered the very foundation stones. Can you picture to yourself, Lamia, a filthier set of barbarians? Nevertheless, Vitellius decided in their favour, and I received orders to put a stop to the work." Luke also records that some of the people told Jesus "of the Galilæans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices." And we have abundant evidence that his rule was of the sternest and most pitiless kind when his plans were thwarted.

The Procurator was not one who inspired love. His short-cropped hair and low forehead gave him a look of determination which had found ample room for expression. While the beady eyes, the thin-lipped cynical mouth, denoted one who would have few scruples about the means adopted to reach any given end. He had grown embittered with the years, meeting guile with cunning, and diplomacy with duplicity. His better self had become stunted, over-borne with the bestial and selfish, so that the finer traits of his character were almost extinct. And this was the man who awaited the pleasure of the Elders that morning. Would his mood be conciliatory? The summons to convene the court thus early was not unusual, for the business of the day was often transacted between six and eight o'clock, before the heat became too intense. But to hear a case of this kind was another matter. He was well-informed as to what was happening; it was his duty as governor to know what the Jews had in mind.

And moreover, possibly the Galilæan had been the topic of conversation more than once between Pilate and his wife. That would be natural. Such a Man was interesting even to one of Pilate's stamp, for apart from the Teacher's character, He had done much to expose the subterfuges and hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders, and so would earn the gratitude of the Governor's heart. And now, Jesus had fallen into their clutches!

If anything were needed to add to Pilate's resentment, we have only to recall the view expressed by the Elders that they could not enter the house of a Gentile before the Feast without being polluted. The patrician saw in this a veiled insult to himself. As if anything could defile that unwashed horde, that set of unscrupulous schemers! Yet in the light of his previous experience, he could not refuse to accede to their demands, and as they would not enter his court, he must go forth to them. The place of meeting was called Gabbatha—the Pavement. This was an ornate terrace, covered with mosaics and joining the two wings of Herod's palace, then the official residence of the Governor. And a group of the priestly party stood before the balustrade, together with some others who had been instrumental in arresting Jesus, while in the forefront stood the Prisoner Himself. It was a motley assembly, and Pilate's gorge rose. He had already considered his course of action, and having no intention of playing into the hands of this mob, he demanded in harsh tones, "What accusation bring ye against this Man?"

The cudgels were immediately taken up. Pilate's stern look indicated that this was not going to be

the simple matter the Jews had hoped. "If He were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered Him up unto thee."

So that was their attitude! The Procurator scowled. He was sensitive about his rights as ruler of this people, and this was a gratuitous insult. They had already heard the case, and having decided on their verdict, they came to him merely as an unpleasant necessity? Then he would let them know how matters stood. "Take ye Him and judge Him according to your law." The sneer conveyed in the words, "your law," was not lost on them. Stung by the insolent bearing of this alien, they said more than they intended. "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death." Pilate relaxed a little at this admission of their servitude. It sounded agreeable. He felt inclined to laugh. He held the whip hand, and they knew it. At the same time, he was not going to overlook the slight they had put on him in trying the case first. They had evidently condemned this Man to death, and now they called in the civil power. Yet when it did not suit them, they would not admit its validity! All they wanted was official sanction to wreak their vengeance on One who had bearded them in their den! Pilate understood. So instead of disposing of the case, and accepting the impartial verdict of the Jewish court as they trusted he would, he took the unwelcome line of examining the Prisoner for himself.

The second stage of the conflict began. No judge could arrive at a decision with any semblance of dignity or justice while that excited crowd yelled its demands. And, in addition, the charges pre-

ferred against Jesus were certainly grave. Yet it almost makes us despair of human nature when we see the lengths to which men will go. The priests knew perfectly well that the charge of blasphemy would carry no weight with Pilate, so they pressed their case with deliberate falsehoods. "We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying that He Himself is Christ a king." Only three days before, Jesus had urged the payment of tribute, but that was immaterial. They had stated their case. It was craftily conceived. If Pilate would not hand the Prisoner over without further parley, at least they would show the Governor that they held him in their grip. And Pilate saw their subtlety. Let him acquit this Man, and they would at once pose as patriots who, having denounced a rebel, had been set at nought. Philo says that some time before this the Jews had "exasperated Pilate to the greatest possible degree, as he feared lest they might go on an embassy to the emperor, and might impeach him with respect to other particulars of his government—his corruptions, his acts of insolence, his rapine, and his habit of insulting people, his cruelty and his continual murders of people untried and uncondemned, and his never-ending and gratuitous and most grievous inhumanity." If but a tithe of that indictment were true, we can understand the difficulties with which Pilate's way was strewn.

Although custom forbade the Elders to enter the court, that did not preclude Pilate from taking the Prisoner into the judgment hall if he wished. So face to face these two, so diverse and different, confront each other. Concern can be seen in both.

Pilate is thinking about his own future; Jesus about the victory of the higher impulses which have begun to assert themselves in the ruler's heart.

"Art Thou the king of the Jews?" Pilate's contemptuous smile shows that he is inclined to pity the Prisoner. That this poor bound figure should be a king appealed to his sense of humour. The rough handling to which Jesus had been subjected had left its marks on Him. The sleepless night and its attendant agony had graven the sacred face deeply. And all combined to make any claim to kingship seem absurd to one who was familiar with the pomp and circumstance of emperors. There is no doubt that Pilate looked on Jesus as one of the numerous deluded fellows who periodically put forward some pretensions to power. At best, He might be a brave and candid soul incensed by the shams of current religion. At the worst, He was perchance a misguided fanatic, more indiscreet than wicked, who cherished a notion that he was a descendant of some former royal house of the Hebrews. So indulgently, Pilate waited for the answer which might give him the cue for further action.

"Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of Me?" The penetrating gaze of Christ was fixed on the shifty eyes before Him. His calm tones were disconcerting. Had He vehemently affirmed His kingship, Pilate would have known what to do. But he was not prepared to be questioned by his Prisoner. He flamed up. "Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered Thee unto me. What hast Thou done?" And Pilate smote viciously on the arm of his chair.

But his hot words were unnecessary. Christ's quiet reply disarmed His adversary. Were He a king in the ordinary sense, what would follow His arrest? Would not His friends and supporters have resisted with all the force at their command? Pilate was no novice in such matters. He knew what had occurred before when rebels had risen against the government. Blood had been poured out mercilessly on both sides. But there had been no such violence in connection with this Man. His kingdom was not of this world. He had come to bear witness to eternal things, and the temporal authority wielded by earth's monarchs exercised no fascination for Him. And Pilate was perturbed. Lord Bacon begins one of his essays in this way: "What is truth? said jesting Pilate; and would not stay for an answer." But is that correct? Pilate was in no mood for jesting when he questioned Jesus. Imperious and unstable though he may have been, he was impressed by this remarkable figure before him. In all his experience, he had never met one like Him before. And the examination came to an end. Pilate had made up his mind, as far as such a mind could ever reach any definite conclusion. He led Jesus back to the waiting Elders, and declared, "I find in Him no fault at all." That was the deliberate judgment to which he had come.

Pilate had reckoned without his opponents. The third stage of the enquiry finds them pressing their charges with renewed vigour. "He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place." It was the first true word they had spoken. Verily, Jesus had stirred

men's hearts. He had re-kindled the dying embers of hope and aspiration. He had moved sluggish souls with desire for the good. Even the worldly heart of Pilate had felt the impact of that exalted character. But while they argued, Pilate caught a word that suggested a means of ridding himself of this thorny problem. It was "Galilee." The northern province did not come under his rule. Herod Antipas was in control, and as he happened to be in Jerusalem, Pilate decided to remit the case to him. It could do no harm, and it might relieve Pilate of the necessity of seeing the matter through. Irresolute and undetermined, he felt that was an admirable course.

The tumult died down as the Prisoner was led away to Herod, and Pilate sat in the inner court unable to dismiss the incident from his mind. Spectres of the past worried him. He need not ask what he ought to have done with Jesus; he knew that He was innocent. It was like the fiendish cunning of those priests to assail an inoffensive Man like that, especially if they had some personal end to gain. Pilate had faced the same hostility in other ways. And now he feels regret that he did not acquit this Preacher and let them threaten what they liked. But it was too late! It had passed out of his hands, and the responsibility belonged to Herod. Besides, it were impolitic for Pilate to act against the wishes of these people, no matter how he detested them. He had his career to consider! But his better nature, little though he had heeded it, seemed to argue that there were other matters that might be just as momentous as his own ambitions, even if his past made it hard to do right.

"Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought;
And enterprises of great pith and moment,
With this regard, their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action."

The fourth stage was as unexpected as it was perplexing. Pilate had not counted on the fact that perhaps Herod would not assume the responsibility thrust on him. Yet he was no more willing to face the fury of his own ecclesiastics than Pilate was to risk an adverse report to Rome. The matter had still to be decided, and it seemed decreed that Pilate must meet the challenge to conscience and right. Try as he would, he could not avoid it.

Again he faced the priests. They were getting restive. They understood that the Governor had sent Jesus to Herod for some reason of his own, and they suspected a ruse to free Him on technical grounds. But Pilate, concealing his disquietude announced that, in view of the charges brought against the Nazarene, he had submitted the case for Herod's judgment, and they had both reached the same conclusion independently of each other:—there was nothing which brought this Man within the scope of the law. Yet he was willing to be reasonable; he would have the Prisoner flogged, and then released. Pilate did not state on what grounds he based this illegal suggestion. He had no reason to offer. Yet his own lack of both principle and resoluteness can be seen. An interruption occurred at this juncture. A messenger came from Pilate's home, bearing tidings of a dream which had filled the mind of Pilate's wife with the gloomiest fore-

bodings. She was apprehensive lest evil should befall them through any injustice done to Jesus, and her plea was that He should be allowed to go.

Meanwhile, however, the crowd began a noisy demonstration. Incited by the Elders, they demanded that the case should be terminated, and Jesus handed over for crucifixion. Inwardly trying to justify himself, and arguing that he had done his utmost, the Governor at last consented. He did endeavour to prove that their verdict was not his. Calling for a bowl of water, with one of the most lamentable pieces of pantomime which has ever marred the cause of justice or the pages of history, he washed his hands before them all, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it." Unthinking, they took him at his word. "His blood be on us and on our children." What a ghastly pretence on the one side; what an inheritance to bequeath to succeeding generations on the other. Is it possible to transfer guilt as Pilate sought to do? He might wash his hands, but he could not efface the stain upon his soul. The futile efforts of Lady Macbeth were no more effectual than his. The doctor and the waiting-woman see the queen walking in her sleep. "What is it she does now?" exclaims the medical man. "Look how she rubs her hands." The woman replies, "It is an accustomed action with her to seem thus washing her hands. I have known her continue in this a quarter of an hour." And they hear the guilty queen say, "Yet here's the spot . . . out, damned spot! out, I say! . . . Here's the smell of blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand."

Pilate swept the promptings of conscience aside, and handed Jesus over to the guard. The Victim was tied to a pillar, and His back bared. The scourge loaded with lead or pieces of sharp bone, brought blood at every stroke. The Russian knout or the cat-o'-nine-tails were merciful compared with that. But as though this were not enough, the soldiers entered into the spirit of the thing. Perhaps there were some old scores to pay off for Jewish scoffing and insult, and this was a Jew. And with many a vile epithet, they flung an old toga over His lacerated flesh. Was He a king? Then He must be attired in a way befitting His rôle. They twisted a bramble into a crown, and forced it down on His brow till the blood flowed. Then putting a length of reed in His bound hands for a sceptre, they rendered Him obeisance. "Hail, king of the Jews," they cried, spitting in His face, and hitting Him over the head till the blood spurted from the thorn wounds on His brow. And outside, sat Pilate musing over the evil chance that had brought him to that hour. Where had he gone astray that he should be thus made the sport of fate? He had done his best, even if it had been unavailing, and though his wife had interceded for this Peasant from Galilee, she could not know how involved were the issues. She would doubtless blame him just as vehemently were he to allow leniency to this Man to jeopardize his own position. He cursed the Jews who had placed him in this dilemma; he condemned himself just as much because he had allowed himself to be party to their schemes. Just then, Pilate caught a glimpse of the Prisoner beyond the curtained portals. He was dressed like a king in

one of the old comedies, and an idea lit up the mind of the Procurator. If he were moved, Stoic though he was, by the spectacle of this forlorn figure, might it not have the same effect on the rabble?

Motioning to his soldiers to bring the Prisoner just as He is, Pilate raises his hand for silence. A hush falls on the crowd. "Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said unto them, Ecce Homo—Behold the Man!" And strange it were if any could look on Him without seeing that His claim to be a king in any temporal sense were absurd. Such was Pilate's first thought. Yet as he looked from the faces livid with passion, and then at the majestic face of Christ, his words took on another meaning. It was as though he said, "Look for yourselves. This is indeed the Man! He has borne your bitter words and the more bitter scourging without a cry. He has proved Himself to be worth a thousand of such despicable dogs as you are. Behold *the* Man!" But did the mob grasp his subtle meaning? With renewed intensity they clamour for His death. "Crucify Him!" Pilate's patience is exhausted, and yet he still argues the point. Then a further accusation was brought against Jesus that having made Himself the Son of God, according to their law He ought to die. It was the first time this had been said in Pilate's hearing. It touched a new chord in a breast that had been stirred by many an unfamiliar emotion that day. He was sufficiently conversant with religious lore to know that such a thing had been mentioned before, and, foiled on every hand, he made one more desperate attempt to deliver Jesus from His foes.

Professor Stalker has pointed out that probably the Procurator divined that to do an injury to one of Divine origin might incur a blight that would follow him all his days. "Might not Jesus be the son of the Hebrew Jehovah—so his heathen mind reasoned—as Castor and Pollux were the sons of Jupiter?" And the message of his wife came back with renewed insistency. Perhaps she had grasped intuitively what he had missed.

He took Jesus inside the judgment hall again, and demanded His origin. The silence of the Prisoner filled him with wrath. Why did not Jesus reply? It could not have mitigated the guilt of this irresolute soul. Pilate already had sufficient light to show him the path of honour. To give him more would but increase his culpability, even if it did not dazzle his eyes. As Cowper expresses it:

> ". . . 'Twas Pilate's question put
> To Truth itself, that deigned him no reply.
> And wherefore? Will not God impart His light
> To them that ask it? Freely—'tis His joy,
> His glory, and His nature to impart.
> But to the proud, uncandid, insincere,
> Or negligent enquirer, not a spark!"

Christ did remind him, however, that the power which His judge boasted was a pure phantom of his imagination. He who might have either condemned or released his Prisoner earlier in the proceedings had already made an irrevocable choice. And Pilate realized it. The set of the sails and the lie of the rudder determine the course. His subsequent effort to move the people from their clamant demands showed him that the die was cast. "If thou let this

Man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend: whoso maketh himself a king speaketh against Cæsar." And Pilate delivered Him to be crucified.

Pilate the irresolute has gone down to history as one who could have done good, and yet did evil. With reproaches almost equalling those which gather on the head of Judas, he is reviled as a traitor to the best. Yet it might be asked whether any other course would have saved Christ from the cross? Even if this illegal proceeding had failed through Pilate's firmness, the Jews would most likely have taken matters into their own hands, and have killed Him as later they did Stephen. But that does not minimize Pilate's responsibility. Halting between two opinions, he chose not the path of duty, but that of supposed safety. Although prompted by his knowledge that Jesus was the victim of malicious hypocrisy, impelled by the pleadings of his wife to act justly, he took the line of personal interest and that which promised the least interference with his plans. Yet he missed the goal on which his heart was set. He was ultimately recalled to Rome, forfeiting not only the position to which he had held on so tenaciously, but also the respect both of himself and of every honest man. We quote Anatole France again, though this time with profound disagreement. Lamia is talking to Pilate of "a young Galilæan thaumaturgist. 'His name was Jesus, He came from Nazareth, and He was crucified for some crime, I don't quite know what. Pontius, do you remember anything about the Man?' Pontius Pilate contracted his brows, and his hand rose to his forehead in the attitude of one who probes the deeps of memory. Then after

a silence of some seconds—'Jesus,—of Nazareth? I cannot call Him to mind.'" Nothing could be further from probability. The face of Jesus would be imprinted on the soul of this callous Governor until his dying day. His own fortunes were too closely bound up with that eventful period for it to be otherwise, and many a time through the subsequent years, conscience like an avenging fury would scourge him with even more pitiless hand than that which, at his direction, had scored the back of the Nazarene.

The fatal sin of irresolution dogs the steps of men to this day. Certainly their decisions are not fraught with the same importance for the race, and yet they vitally affect some lives for good or evil. Their hearts are confronted with the challenging figure of Jesus Christ, and yet they may palter and delay until the time for action has irrevocably gone. The soul is enthralled with fetters of its own forging, and it is at last unable to follow the highest even when it might so wish. But a noble purpose can give decisiveness to life. Henry Ward Beecher reminds us that "A man's purpose should be like a river, which was born of a thousand rills in the mountains; and when at last it has reached the plain, if you watch it, you shall see little eddies that seem as if they had changed their minds, and were going back again to the mountains, yet all its mighty current flows changeless to the sea. If you build a dam across it, in a few hours it will go over it with the voice of victory. If tides check it at the mouth, it is only that, when they ebb, it can sweep on again to the ocean. So goes the Amazon or the Orinoco across a continent—never losing its way or changing

its direction for the thousand streams that fall into it on the right hand and on the left, but only using them to increase its force, and bearing them onward in its resistless channel."

Such a purposeful life is inspired by the Gospel of Christ. And when that is crowned with industry and perseverance, none can set a limit to its usefulness and conquests. Such resolution enabled Empedocles to sacrifice himself on Etna. It gave strength to Attalus in the hour of martyrdom, and to a frail girl like Blandina it imparted courage which made her able to cheer her fellow-Christians, though she herself was in torment. It nerved Palissy to continue his research until the elusive secret of the enamel he sought was obtained. It fired William Carey as he plied his cobbler's tools in an obscure Northamptonshire village, again while he fitted himself for his larger task, and when he ventured forth to India itself. Recognition of Jesus as the Anointed of God, by whose sacrifice life comes to its highest development, will create a deep and enduring determination to do the right and follow the best. So shall faith vanquish every obstacle, till the conflict ends in Christ's triumph, and the crown be won.

VII

THE WIFE OF PILATE

"His wife sent unto him saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just Man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him."

—MATT. 27:19.

WAS there ever a more intriguing figure? We are indebted to Matthew for this glimpse of Pilate's wife. Yet we could almost wish that he had told us either more or less of this woman who, at such a critical moment, intervened on behalf of Jesus. She is like a sketch in rough outline which we might discover in an artist's notebook, evidently intended to be used later as material for a full-length portrait. In life's haste, the work was never proceeded with, and the world is thus immeasurably poorer. All the data accompanying the sketch simply tells us who the subject was, and how he came to set the profile on paper. We turn it over in our hands, musing on its hinted beauty, and wondering just what she was like. Was she dignified and stately, as sympathetic as the face suggests? A full answer is out of the question, and yet we have something to indicate what she would have been like had the portrait been painted.

Tradition helps us very little concerning this woman. But it will generally be conceded that she

is a pathetic figure as she is seen in the light of history, for she embodies in a singular degree the power of impotence. The phrase seems contradictory. In one sense it is, and yet it describes Pilate's wife in that hour. She is known to the historian as Claudia Procla, or Procula, and she has been honoured with canonization by the Greek Church, but beyond that, we have little reliable information outside this one verse of Matthew.

Yet much may legitimately be inferred from that brief statement. She appears to be a woman of fine intelligence. She was deeply attached to her husband; in fact, her love for him is the key to the whole incident before us. That is plain when we remember that she was there with him in an alien country when she might have remained in her own blue-canopied Italy. The regulation to which Tacitus refers, forbidding governors to take their wives to the provinces they ruled, had been rescinded, and that explains her presence in Jerusalem. Yet it does not account for the interest she displayed in what was going on about her. Instead of the self-centred, languorous patrician we might imagine, we find one who is appreciative of all she saw. The costumes of these people were as quaint as their customs were fascinating. There was nothing like it in Rome, and as Procula looked through the palace windows, or was borne through the streets in her palanquin, she was a close observer of the teeming life of the capital. She saw women busy with tasks which, arduous in themselves, were lightened by love. They plied their duties in the home—grinding corn, making bread, or tending little children. And she whose arms were empty, whose

hands might not be turned to such humble yet holy ministries, looked wistfully and admiringly at the beautiful women of a conquered nation. Milton says:

> "For nothing lovelier can be found
> In woman, than to study household good,
> And good works in her husband to promote."

The entire round of life was entrancing to her. She was impressed with the religious ceremonies of the people. The venerable rabbis, the dust-laden pilgrims who came from all quarters of the land, the joyous laughter of the children as they joined in the Feast of Tabernacles, were a source of never-ending wonder. While the solemn hush with which the Day of Atonement was observed, filled her with desire to know what these observances implied. Who were these Jews, and why did they keep these perpetual reminders of their history? She would ply her husband with eager questions, and even discuss them with the officials of the Governor's suite. Glad of an excuse to talk with such a charming woman, they would yet only partly satisfy her curiosity. She would learn something of the great Jehovah whom the Jews worshipped. He was not one among many, like the deities of her own nation; on the contrary, He stood supreme. He had entered into a sacred compact with their fathers, so these Jews affirmed, promising to show them favour and shower blessings upon them. But with a cynical smile, the Roman courtier would indicate the value he put on such simple faith, considering that these people had lost everything that made a nation. Still,

their religion kept their minds occupied. That saved them from making mischief which would render the task of governing them even more tiresome. Whence had they come? Centuries before, they had migrated from Egypt. They flattered themselves that they had some mission to fulfil, and their prophets had foretold a day when the sovereignty, wrested from them by their foes, would be restored. The Roman laughed outright. It was too fantastic to suppose that a handful of Jews, who had been compelled to bite the dust, should ever hope to oust their conquerors.

Far from satisfying Procula, this reference to prophecy would start a new line of investigation. She appealed to her Jewish maidens for confirmation of what had been said, and they would tell her a story which would melt her womanly heart. Some thirty years before, it was rumoured that the Messiah had been born. The news spread like wildfire. It was whispered in the bazaars. It passed from lip to lip among the Temple worshippers. There could not be anything in it, said some; tales like that had been heard before. Yet when they afterwards learned that Herod the Great had given orders that all Hebrew babes were to be slain, that put the seal of authenticity on the story. Procula felt the blood drain from her face as she listened, and then come back like an angry flood. She could hardly credit anything so heartless, so brutal, and at the first opportunity, she put the question to Pilate.

"But tell me, can it be that imperial Rome, with her boast that she upholds freedom and justice, could sanction such butchery?"

Pontius Pilate stifled a yawn. "Rome, most noble lady? That was not the work of our emperor, but of Herod, miscalled the Great. He was king here at the time."

"Yea, but he was one of Rome's satellites."

"Truly! It is even as thou sayest. But he was also a Jew. Doubtless he had his own reasons for acting so. He may have feared this Prince might hurl him from his throne, for he had bought the position he held. It would not have been a colossal calamity for the land, methinks, if Herod had found his master. I am weary unto death of the whole brood! But a few days gone, that son of his, they call Antipas, sent to me demanding . . ."

Procula's eyes were blazing, while her breast heaved. "What became of this Prince of whom thou speakest? Was He caught in the net so craftily spread by that monster, or did the Child escape?"

"That, Procula, is more than I know. It is indeed reported that He did escape, and that He afterwards lived in the northern kingdom. However, that is not my concern. Galilee is Herod's province, not mine; and truth to tell, I have more than enough to trouble me with the people at hand. Were it not that I well know Palestine is but a step to preferment, one would gladly sail back whence we came. But enough of this! Thinkest thou not that I have a surfeit of their trickery through the day without having these Jewish matters disturb the peace of evening? Let us not speak of them. What dost thou think of the tidings we have of Tiberius today?"

The one redeeming feature about Pilate was his affection for his wife. He might have said:

". . . Truly not the morning sun of heaven
Better becomes the grey cheeks of the east,
Nor that full star that ushers in the even
Doth half that glory to the sober west,
As those two mourning eyes become thy face."

He was troubled by her solicitude for a race he loathed, but though he changed the subject, the matter was not closed as far as Procula was concerned. A woman of such fine discernment and intuition could not allow it to remain there. Her enquiries were pressed as opportunity offered, and when Jesus visited the capital, linked to some of the strange things she heard through the gossip of her household, she may have ventured abroad to hear Him for herself. Certainly some word of His marvellous doings would reach her; if as we know there was at least one follower in Herod's house—the wife of Chuza—it is not inconceivable that among Procula's attendants there would be some who knew of Jesus.

But all that did not close her eyes to facts nearer home. For some time she had noticed a marked change in Pilate's demeanour. The lines of care were deeper than ever. She loved him devotedly. As Browning reminds us:

"God be thanked, the meanest of His creatures
Boasts two soul-sides, one to face the world with,
One to show a woman when he loves her."

Yet she was sensible that since his appointment to the Procuratorship he had steadily declined. He was not the same man. He had lost all the frankness, the gaiety of spirit, and buoyancy, which once

were his; he was soured and even vengeful. Occasionally, she persuaded him to talk things over with her, and manlike he was glad to unburden himself to a good listener. There is nothing more grateful to the surcharged heart than one who can receive its tale of harassments and worry. But Procula wished to know more fully what was happening in the city. The wiles and unresting hatred of the Jews were a commonplace topic, and there was another subject on which she wanted Pilate to talk. It was the Galilæan. What did he think of this Man? Was it true that He could work such wonders, and did the rumours which identified Him with that Messianic Child portend anything?

Somewhat to her surprise, she found Pilate willing to discuss the great Teacher of Nazareth. The fact was, His presence in the city had much to do with the difficulties which were then confronting the Governor, and the situation was becoming acute. He had instituted enquiries, and though the reports varied, they were at one in this: He seemed inoffensive enough and was no man's enemy but every man's friend. Some said He was as different as could be from the loud-mouthed demagogues who had been a thorn in the side of authority before, and the worst that could be laid to His charge was that He had provoked the anger of the Elders. He had been too outspoken for them, showing up the hollowness of their professions, and the futility of their supposed righteousness; and with all that, Pilate was in hearty agreement. He certainly had a number of followers, but they were for the most part rough, untutored fellows, and while there had been some mention of founding a kingdom, Pilate

was assured that nothing need be feared in that direction. That the leaders were inclined to persecute Him provided Pilate with a welcome relief from their attentions, giving them some one else to annoy instead of himself. But that was the sum of his information.

The fact that Procula uses the term "that just Man" in her message to Pilate proves that He had thus been discussed by them both; no further need was felt for distinguishing Him. But what effect would her husband's revelations have on her? Would she not prosecute her enquiries with renewed zest? No hint of any personal regard for the Nazarene must escape her when talking to those of her circle. Yet in view of the canonization to which we referred, we wonder if she had come under the power of Christ's superb life. If her soul had not been captured by this gracious Master, her subsequent action is the more inexplicable.

That morning, when Pontius Pilate was summoned to the judgment hall, Procula was fully conversant with his mission. Doubtless, he told her himself what was impending. Jesus was to be tried for His life. It was still early, and as she lay thinking over the crisis which had arisen, she fell asleep again. Her brain was busy though her body rested. She felt instinctively that two careers were at stake in that momentous hour. And in her dream she saw the Galilæan, like a deer pressed by baying hounds, pulled down to death. The exultant cries of the hunters were heard as they swarmed round the bleeding form. Then to Procula's horror, the face changed to that of her husband. He had

fallen victim to the malice of the Elders. She started up with a cry, her brow clammy with fear. What should she do? It may have been more superstition than spirituality which caused her to attach such importance to her dream, but she could not remain passive, knowing the danger which threatened. Of course, she was assuming serious responsibility in sending a message to Pilate. It was not that she feared his anger; the bond between them was too close for that. It was rather that were it known that she had interfered with the administration of justice, the peril she sought to avert would swiftly engulf her husband. The Scribes and Pharisees would have no compunction. The Governor would be called on to explain before the imperial authorities what was really indefensible. To permit a woman, even though she were his wife, to pervert justice was unpardonable.

In *Julius Cæsar* we have a similar picture of another Roman wife, scenting from afar the danger which threatened her husband. Cæsar was due to appear at the Senate, but thrice in her sleep that night, Calpurnia had cried out, "They murder Cæsar!" It unnerved him, and sending to the priests, he asked them to find out what were the auguries for the day. They counselled him not to stir from his home. Calpurnia's vision was related. She had looked on his statue like a fountain running with blood, and when he speaks of this to Decius, his friend, he adds:

> "These does she apply for warnings, and portents,
> And evils imminent, and on her knee
> Hath begged that I will stay at home to-day."

He felt that womanly intuition saw what was hidden from reason's colder eyes. And Procula herself seemed to know that her dream had some basis in fact. The Teacher might be a messenger from God Himself, and this were a warning which must be heeded. There is a passage in one of Maeterlinck's works that throws some light on this. "It would seem that women are more largely swayed by destiny than ourselves. They submit to its decrees with far more simplicity. . . . They are still nearer to God, and yield themselves with less reserve to the pure workings of mystery. And therefore is it, doubtless, that all the incidents in our life in which they take part, seem to bring us to what might almost be the very fountain-head of destiny. It is above all when by their side that moments come unexpectedly, when a 'clear presentiment' flashes across us, a presentiment of a life that does not always seem parallel to the life we know of. . . . Women are indeed the veiled sisters of all the great things we do not see."

Procula felt that nothing but evil could befall her husband were he to side with these plotters against One so different, and she shuddered at the dreadful consequences. A word from her might turn the scale in Christ's favour, and a gross miscarriage of justice be avoided. Whatever Pilate lacked of moral courage or resoluteness, his wife certainly possessed. She saw her duty, and she was brave enough to face the thankless and difficult task laid on her. Even though she were moved by no higher consideration than safeguarding her husband's honour and her own happiness, that were

praiseworthy. Yet if we have read her true character, there were other reasons. She would not have couched her message in those terms had she not sensed some grave issue—"I have suffered many things because of Him." And there was also an indication that this step was required of her, else why the impression made by her dream? So she reasoned; and the message was sent. For the saying, "love is blind," did not apply to Procula. On the contrary, love saw with clear eyes that if her husband were to be saved from irretrievable disaster, she must act. She had watched him through the years, entering into his ambitions with zest. He had set his heart on rising to the highest position possible in the empire, and when temporary exile promised promotion, she embraced it eagerly. But she had begun to ask if some things could not be bought at too high a price. Pilate was losing his very soul. His nature had perceptibly coarsened, and he had done things with ease of which before Procula had deemed him incapable. Yet her counsel and influence were ever on the side of the angels, and she still hoped that she might win him to a better course.

We can understand her feelings better by turning to the mirror furnished in *A Christmas Carol.* Scrooge, still a young man, is talking with his fiancée. She has broken off their engagement, and, asked for a reason, she says softly: "Another idol has displaced me . . . a golden one. You fear the world too much. All your other hopes have merged into the hope of being beyond the chance of its sordid reproach. I have seen your nobler aspirations fall

off one by one, until the master-passion, Gain, engrosses you. Have I not?" And Procula knew it to be as true of Pilate.

The effect of that message sent to him on the judgment seat can never be fully known. We see his brows contract. He is annoyed, for this tends to make a decision even more difficult. If Procula had these convictions about the Nazarene, she ought to have told him before, and not have left it until he were actually engaged in the trial. Now he could not well help himself! The masculine proneness to blame another, like Adam who placed the responsibility on "the woman which Thou gavest to me," came to the top. Truly, the position was delicate. The priestly party was urging its case with tireless persistence. How then could he act? Procula might mean well, but she was only a woman, impressionable and impulsive, and she could not know what he had to face. She thought he was in the seat of authority; yet he knew himself to be at the mercy of these implacable Jews—as much at their mercy as the Nazarene Himself! Side with Him, and they would repay his clemency in their own shameful currency. No; that would not do. He was playing for high stakes, and his losses were so great that he dared not stop now! And the case went on to its tragic conclusion.

Then Procula failed? Not altogether; failure is only a relative term. She had made it easier for Pilate to do right, and harder to be untrue to his duty; and that can scarcely be described as complete failure. "A good wife," says Jeremy Taylor in his old-world fashion, "is heaven's last, best gift to man; his angel of mercy; minister of graces in-

numerable; his gem of many virtues; his casket of jewels." And Pilate realized that. If only he had listened to her before, things might have been different. The influence of a woman is tremendous. Plutarch depicts the baleful power which Cleopatra wielded over Antony. Once in her toils, honour and duty became only empty terms. And when he died on his own sword, his manhood had first perished in defiance of the high dictates of conscience. Delilah's hateful influence over Samson is a similar case. And yet, for Pilate, as for other men, there were forces at work which might have brought victory instead of disaster, had he but availed himself of their aid. His wife stood for the high against the low, for the spiritual against the material, for honour against overweening ambition. It was not that he was in ignorance of the true state of affairs. It was rather that knowing the facts, he declined to follow the path leading to the heights. Nathaniel Hawthorne, having lost his government position, went home, dejected and almost desperate. His wife, after a time, learning the reason of his gloom, instead of giving way to reproaches, set pen and ink on the table, and lighting a fire in the grate, put her arms about his shoulders. "Now you will be able to write your book!" He took heart of grace, and the world was enriched with *The Scarlet Letter, The House of the Seven Gables, Tanglewood Tales,* etc. Yet they came into being not through his adversity, but through the believing love of a woman.

It is as Ruskin tells us. "She sees the qualities of things, their claims and their places. Her great function is praise; she enters into no conquest, but

infallibly judges the crown of conquest." Countess Tolstoy not only inspired much of her husband's work, but also took an active part in its production. She copied out the whole of *War and Peace* no fewer than seven times, because she was the only one who could make out his wretched handwriting, or understand the innumerable corrections with which he adorned her pages after she had transcribed his notes. Mahomet being asked by his young wife, Ayesha, if he did not love her better than the homely Khadija whom he had first married replied, "No; she was old and ugly, I grant. But when none believed in me, she did, and encouraged me in my work." And it is well-known that when Garfield was installed as President of the United States, he refused to take the seat of honour set before the assembled multitude. Instead, he led to it a frail old lady with silver hair. The reason was, as he explained later, that he owed everything he had achieved to her. She had been his counsellor, his comfort in distress, his inspiration, for she was—his mother.

Procula acted as she did "because of Him," and her efforts in that pregnant hour entitle her to a place on the roll of the world's greatest women. And the same thing has moved women's souls ever since. Woman owes so much to Jesus Christ that it were surprising if some sense of her indebtedness to Him were not stirred. It is "because of Him" that she ceased to be a mere chattel or plaything, and was given her rightful place by man's side. Because of Him she has felt the wrongs of the oppressed, pleading the cause of ill-kept prisoners as did Elizabeth Fry, the needs of toiling children as

did Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the lot of the poor as did Frances E. Willard. That is not all. The appeal comes to every heart to obey the promptings of love, to fling the safeguard of an ennobling influence around the feet of the tempted, and to inspire obedience to Christ in those with whom life has bound us. And though Procula did not accomplish the one object she had at heart, she yet shows the power of impotence. The force of her example may still be fruitful in the lives of women and men of the present time, and of Procula as well as every true woman shall it be said:

". . . Men at her side
Grew nobler, girls purer, as through the whole town
The children were gladder that pulled at her gown;
The weak and the gentle, the ribald and rude,
She took as she found them, and did them all good;
None knelt at her feet, confessed lovers in thrall;
They knelt more to God than they used—that was all."

VIII

HEROD, THE SUPERFICIAL

"As soon as he (Pilate) knew that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod."

—Luke 23:7.

"GOD moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform." If ever that were true it was surely in those eventful hours preceding the passion of our Lord. Men with whom His mission had brought Him into conflict come together on the stage of history. Was it that their real character might be better appraised? Was it that we might see Jesus in a still clearer light? Be that as it may, after Annas and Caiaphas, followed by Pilate, we are thrust into the presence of Herod, the superficial.

It is almost inevitable that, when the same name is borne by different men, there should be some confusion in the minds of those who read the Gospels. The name of Herod occurs time after time, and discrimination is essential to an intelligent grasp of events. It stands only too often for cruelty, licence, and subterfuge. Let us take a swift survey of this family; it will remove some misunderstanding. In the time of the Maccabees, an Idumæan named Antipater, a man devoid of principle yet undoubtedly sagacious, came into prominence. He

rendered signal service to the Roman emperor, Pompey, in his Egyptian campaign, and on its victorious conclusion, Antipater went to Rome to claim his reward. He sought more than gold; he had political ambitions. So he returned as governor of Galilee. In due course, the office passed to his son who became Herod the Great. He in turn secured further imperial favours. By judicious gifts and sycophancy, he obtained the title "King of the Jews" from Cæsar Augustus, and came back to Palestine in triumph.

Herod's rule was tyrannical, and yet marked by considerable cleverness. Having crushed an incipient rebellion at Massada, he installed himself in the city of David, building an imposing palace on Mount Zion to impress his Jewish subjects. He made a further bid for their support, by adding generosity to his opulent state. The old Temple of Solomon, which had been rebuilt by Zerubbabel some five hundred years before, had become dilapidated. So Herod projected a new building worthy alike of Jehovah and of the nation that worshipped Him. The scheme took forty-six years to complete, and was indeed a triumph of architecture. As the king grew older, he became moody and morose. He discovered plots where they did not exist. He could trust no one, even as none trusted him. And when tidings were brought to him that One had been "born king of the Jews," it caused panic in the breast of him who was king not by birth but by bribery. So he promulgated that edict which plunged Judæa into sorrow, and left "The heart of Rachel for her children mourning."

At Herod's death, it was found that he had left

three separate wills, making various dispositions among his sons. The first declared that Antipater should be his successor; the second nominated Antipas; while the third awarded the crown to Archelaus, with only tetrarchies to Antipas and Philip. These wills were naturally contested. Antipas and Archelaus went to Rome personally to appeal to the emperor for his ruling. Augustus with fitting dilatoriness at last gave his decision. It gave Judæa, Samaria, and Idumæa to Archelaus; Antipas was given Galilee and Peræa; while Philip was made tetrarch of Ituræa and Trachonitis.

Now it was the second of these princes, Antipas, who is here designated Herod, and who played a sinister part in the Gospel story. His income from the two provinces of Galilee and Peræa amounted to 200 talents per annum (about £48,000 or $240,000). He married the daughter of Aretas, an Arabian king, and built Tiberius for his capital. But his self-indulgent life bred the usual evils. While on a visit to Rome, he met again his brother, Philip, who had married Herodias. Antipas, falling violently in love—if that noble term can be applied to such a sordid occurrence—formed a shameful alliance with her. He sought a divorce from his wife who fled to her father at the news, and Herod Antipas bore his prize back in triumph.

About this time, a striking figure appeared from desert solitudes. His words smote on the ears of the groundlings like thunder. They scorched the souls of hypocritical religionists like molten metal. It was John the Baptist. He declared the coming of a Mighty One whose kingdom must soon be established. And it was not long before Herod's

interest was aroused. He kept in touch with current events through his informers, and the eloquence of this orator from the hills had set people talking. Herod, having been educated in Rome, may have had some interest in the rhetoricians whose art then flourished. Or, on the other hand, bored by the placid life of the palace, his liaison having begun to pall, Herod thought this fiery fanatic might provide some new sensation. Whatever the motive the preacher was summoned to the royal presence.

The court assembled. That broad-chested, suntanned man of the desert was ushered in. His uncouth garb of camel-hair cloth, held in at the waist by a leather girdle, his erect figure with its flowing locks and beard, the sandals and gnarled staff, made a picture arrestive in the extreme. What would he do? Recite some thrilling passage from the books of his gods, or proclaim the advent of some king whom his vivid imagination had conceived? Herod playfully touches the woman at his side, and bids her listen. She will hear that which will put the platitudes of their counsellors, and the mad antics of the court buffoons into the shade! And verily she does. The fearless servant of God was swift to seize his opportunity. He knew the character of this ruler. Possibly a word from the sacred writings which his father, Zacharias, had expounded came to mind as he stood amidst those scenes of magnificence. "As a roaring lion, and a ranging bear; so is a wicked ruler over the poor people." Herod had left a trail of evil example and influence across society, and godliness, purity, and the sanctity of the home, were alike depreciated in value because of his life. John had no smooth words

for such as he. With unflinching courage, with eyes that flashed and words that burned, he denounced the king's corruptness. By all the laws of God and man, he was an outcast. Yet he was so far lost to all sense of decency that he could flaunt his sin in the face of God's servant, and even glory in his shame. John showed the hoary fallacy that the king could do no wrong, to be a lie framed in the lowest hell. *Noblesse oblige* ought to have been the motto of one who had been exalted thus, and he should have known that a monarch lives:

> "In that fierce light which beats upon a throne,
> And blackens every blot!"

The weak, sensual face of Herod darkened into a frown at John's words, as the sky is overspread with thunder-clouds. Then the storm broke. He issues his commands in a high-pitched voice, vibrant with passion. The Baptist is seized by the guards, and hurried to the dungeons. He was the prototype of Chrysostom who, in the Church of St. Sophia in Constantinople, condemned the scandalous life of the Empress Eudoxia, and of John Knox rebuking the impure life of Mary's court from the pulpit of St. Giles.

> "The brave man is not he who feels no fear;
> For that were stupid and irrational;
> But he whose noble soul its fear subdues,
> And bravely dares the danger nature shrinks from."

The better to understand Herod's character, we look at what followed. He was celebrating his birthday. The wine had been flowing, and the now maud-

lin king, moved by the sensuous dance of Salome, the daughter of his paramour, made his half-drunken promise. Prompted by her mother, she asked neither gold nor gems, but the head of John, the valiant. Although he knew that he had been tricked, Herod would not draw back lest he should appear more ridiculous in the eyes of his guests—as though that were possible. And John was executed. Did the incident end there? If the beliefs of that day amounted to anything, it ought to have done; John was dead. Grim proof of that fact had been borne in upon a dish, so ghastly and incongruous amid the riotous revellings of that banqueting-hall. But Herod could not put the sight from him. The mingled cries of horror and hilarity from his guests, the mad whirling dance with which Salome circled round the attendants, could not be forgotten. Why? Because news reached him that a Preacher was ranging Galilee, and he could draw only one conclusion: "He said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do show themselves in him."

Day after day, he turned matters over in his muddled and muddied brain. Sins like accusing phantoms shot poisoned darts at him from the lurking shadow of every corner, and made the night hideous with their mockings. What though he had built a stronghold, and was surrounded by his guards, they could not keep these afar. It is said that Nicephorus Phocas, having built a high wall about his palace to afford security, heard a voice crying in the night, "O emperor, though thou build thy wall as high as the clouds, yet if sin be within,

it will overthrow all." Then Herod tried to assert control over his fears. It could not be John, for John was dead. Yet, as Luke relates, his heart demanded, "Who is this of whom I hear such things? And he desired to see Him." What was his reason for wishing to see Jesus? Was it merely curiosity, or an attempt to lay the ghosts of remorse? The old couplet of Fletcher reminds us:

> "Our acts our angels are, or good or ill,
> Our fatal shadows that walk by us still."

Luke later records a stupid threat Herod made regarding Jesus. Perhaps he had summarily ordered the Master to present Himself at the palace, a command which was ignored. Or the continual reports of His work may have impelled Herod to believe that unless he could lay hands on this Man there was no hope of peace for his troubled mind. When the Pharisees said to Jesus, "Get Thee out and depart hence for Herod will kill Thee," one of the most scathing things that ever fell from His lips indicates His opinion of the king. "Go ye and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected." "That fox"—the embodiment of cunning and cruelty—had met with One who neither feared his anger nor desired his patronage.

This was the man before whom Jesus was to be arraigned. But was he wholly to blame? Admittedly he started life with a heavy handicap. Wealth and power are not the unmixed blessings which from a distance we fondly believe. Herod had a poor beginning; his blood was tainted with the shameful

crimes and self-indulgence of his profligate father. He bore a name which was hated and reviled by all to whom honour was dear. The influence of his environment, no less than his ancestry, was a drawback. He had been brought up to live for money and the things that money could buy. He had been taught to think that the things he could taste and handle were the only things that mattered. Are we then excusing his evil ways? Far from it. We but bespeak kindly judgment for those denied the spiritual advantages that we may have enjoyed. Too often do we fail to make allowance for the handicap of heredity. Yet we dare not make undue excuses for ourselves. The late Dr. R. W. Dale once said: "You tell me that what you are is the result of the follies and vices of a long line of progenitors, that as you bear in your complexion, your features, and even in curious tricks of manner, their image and superscription, so your moral qualities have come to you as an inheritance. . . . I will not quarrel with this way of putting it, I will not ask for the qualification of your statement which I might press for; let it be as you have said; you have been manufactured by your birth and circumstances, and are dissatisfied with the result. Then place yourself in God's hands, and you shall be His 'workmanship created in Christ Jesus to good works.'" Herod must have had some impulse towards the good, but he disregarded the searching counsel of the Baptist. And the ministry of Jesus had made itself felt not only in Herod's province of Galilee, but even in his household, for Joanna, the wife of his steward, had become a follower of Christ. By a strange overruling of Providence, however, they

came face to face at last. Herod's wish to see Jesus was gratified.

Pilate and he were not on good terms. The cause of their estrangement is apparent. Pilate occupied the palace which Herod's father had built in Jerusalem, and the power which he regarded as his right, had been filched from him by this usurping Procurator. But when Pilate, darting like a trapped animal seeking to escape, ascertained that Jesus was a Galilæan, the Governor exercised his right to remit a case to the ruler of the province to which the defendant belonged. He could not, of course, have sent Jesus to Galilee to be tried there. The insistency of the crowd would not have permitted that even had it been necessary. But there was no need, for Herod Antipas had come to Jerusalem to observe the Feast of the Passover. Nominally, he was a Jew. That was due to pressure brought to bear on Antipater, his grandfather. Under the Maccabees, the Idumæans were compelled to accept the Jewish faith or be slain, and Antipater to whom religion meant little, accepted their demands. Thus the house of Herod owned some allegiance to Judaism provided it did not inconvenience its mode of life. The fact that his religion had not kept Herod from his profligacy shows its practical value in his case. Still, these periodic visits to the capital offered a welcome change from the boredom of Galilee, and Herod was staying in the old palace of the Asmonæan princes.

Pilate's message to Herod that Jesus was on His way filled him with anticipation. At last the desire of many months would be fulfilled. He would know whether this were John or not. But one glance was

enough. The two preachers were the poles apart. There was no resemblance between Jesus and His forerunner. He had a certain quiet dignity, it is true, but the bound hands, and evidence of ill-usage, made Him altogether different from the other. Moreover, there was in the face of Jesus a sympathy, a tenderness, that the Baptist's never showed. This was the countenance of One who had felt deeply and suffered greatly. But once assured that his fears had been groundless Herod was not concerned with these things. He was, however, in quest of something to relieve the tedium of his days. Perhaps Jesus, of whom he had heard so much, would show His skill by performing some marvellous feats. The choice could be left to Him. Yet in spite of the express wish of the monarch, Jesus made no attempt to justify the fame He had achieved. Had He no respect for the patron who thus gave Him the opportunity of showing His powers? Apparently not! This reputed worker of miracles remained unmoved. Herod grew restive. Either this Man would not, or could not, do what was asked of Him; and Herod's chagrin was manifest. So he began to ply Jesus with questions.

> "Oh, what authority and show of truth,
> Can cunning sin cover itself withal!"

What were those questions? From what we know of the man, we may be sure that they were frivolous, irrelevant, or profane, for the Master with a severity that was alien to His gracious heart treated them with a contemptuous silence more crushing

than any retort. Plainly, He did not stand in awe of the ruler of Galilee. And Herod's superficial soul was scored. If this Man did not reverence his authority, He must be made to feel its weight. Had Jesus been some gorgeously apparelled monarch who, by the fortunes of war, stood thus bound before Herod, would he have acted as he did? The answer is in the negative. His craven heart would have been too fearful of reprisals. Or he would have sought to curry favour with him by treating him with condescension. Being but a Man in peasant garb, the matter took on a different complexion. Herod could do as he liked, and did it!

> "Be thou clad in russet weed,
> Be thou decked in russet stole,
> Grave these counsels on thy soul:
> Say man's true, genuine estimate
> The grand criterion of his fate,
> Is not, art thou high or low?
> Did thy fortune ebb or flow?
> Did many talents gild the span?
> Or frugal nature grudge thee one?
> Tell them, and press it on their mind,
> As thou thyself must shortly find,
> The smile or frown of awful Heav'n
> To virtue or to vice is given."

Herod was of such different clay that he could not understand One so unperturbed. Yet as Spurgeon says: "Patient silence is the best reply to a gainsaying world. Calm endurance answers some questions infinitely more conclusively than the loftiest eloquence. . . . The anvil breaks a host of hammers by quietly bearing the blows." But Herod

would not admit that. Calling his attendants, he had a festal robe brought in. It was probably a white mantle such as that worn by an aspirant to some given office. This was placed on Christ's shoulders. If He sought to become the Messiah or even the king of the Jews, then it were fitting that He should be arrayed in conformity with His pretensions. Herod laughed uproariously at his own wit. One of the surest ways of commending oneself to a man in authority is to laugh at his jests. The reverse is also true: there is no swifter path to his displeasure than to remain unmoved by his mirth. He is puzzled then to know if, instead of laughing with him, one is inwardly laughing at him. Yet this was too solemn an hour for the heart to be mirthful. Jesus saw the tragedy of a man jesting in the face of spiritual disaster. Like some poor clown, he playfully danced on the casket enclosing the dead form of his higher nature. And Christ was sorrowful not because of what was done to Him, but because of the folly of this fool of the shallow heart.

What ribald sallies would fall from those sensual lips! With keen insight, Swift declares, "Satire is a sort of glass wherein beholders generally discover everybody's face but their own." His ridicule would be coloured by his own evil mode of life. Did he taunt this sinless soul with the unworthy associates who were presumably His boon companions? Did he with vile suggestion and unsparing plainness of speech mock the Galilæan who, thus put to the test, could not substantiate a single claim to supernatural powers? Herod, who knew no restraint on conduct, would not be likely to have any upon his unruly

tongue. And yet Jesus remained silent! We need not ask the reason. Frederick the Great said on one occasion: "I think as Epictetus did: 'If evil be said of thee, and if it be true, correct thyself; if it be a lie, laugh at it.' By dint of time and experience, I have learned to be a good post-horse. I go through my appointed daily stage, and I care not for the curs who bark at me along the road." Which things are not without point for us. We need to speak out fearlessly in some cases, defending ourselves against vile calumnies and baseless lies, or to give an answer concerning the faith that is in us. Jesus did so on occasion. Yet there are other times when we can best afford to keep a resolute silence, for some attacks are beneath contempt even as those emanating from Herod. Character is the acid test by which we may ascertain their real value. Boswell, having been insulted by some one, went off to Dr. Johnson, and poured forth his woes. The Doctor laughed and said, "Consider, sir, how insignificant this will appear twelve months hence." Boswell took the counsel to heart, and says himself: "Were this consideration applied to most of the little vexations of life, by which our quiet is too often disturbed, it would prevent many painful sensations. I have tried it frequently, and with good effect." The man who is always giving people a piece of his mind can rarely afford to be so generous with that faculty. His mental state often indicates the extent of his previous lavishness. But Christ is our example. He illustrates that observation of Drexilius. "The command of one's self is the greatest empire a man can aspire unto. And consequently, to be subject to our passions is the most

grievous slavery. Neither is there any triumph more glorious than that of the victory obtained of ourselves where, whilst the conflict is so short, the reward shall ever last."

The moral triumph of Christ was not lost upon Herod. This Man seemed to have linked His life to an immortal principle, for He had kept a firm hand on Himself throughout. And in spite of all He had endured of mental torment, there was a certain kingliness that, at last, even Herod could not wholly fail to appreciate.

> "For 'tis the mind that makes the body rich;
> And as the sun breaks through the darkest clouds,
> So honour peereth in the meanest habit."

Something stirred in the ruler's superficial soul. His vanity had been tickled by the deference Pilate had shown him in remitting the case for his opinion. Henceforth, he would let bygones be bygones, and show the magnanimity that befitted a king. He would let this Roman Procurator also know that his own judgment did not fall one whit behind the acute mind of the imperial official. When he sent Jesus back to Pilate, therefore, his verdict coincided with that of the Governor.

Pilate later announced that to the priests. "I, having examined Him before you, have found no fault in this Man, touching those things whereof you accuse Him. No, nor yet Herod." And to what conclusion are we led? Here is One who, under the most trying circumstances and the greatest provocation, knew that control which could not be shaken by His enemies. More, accused by those

whose hatred nothing could placate, whose charges were unconditioned by the truth, we are confronted by One whose life was without stain. This is surely "the noblest, the brotherliest, and the most heroic-minded Being, who ever walked God's earth." He is that, but He is more. The devout heart sees in Him the manifestation of the perfect life to which we are called, and God's superb sacrifice for human sin. And with reverential wonder the heart exclaims:

> "I give Thee back the life I owe,
> That in Thine ocean depths its flow
> May richer, fuller be."

Herod, the superficial, eventually reaped what he had sown. Aretas declared war upon his erstwhile son-in-law for his perfidious conduct, in which Herod suffered defeat. Later, at the instigation of Herodias, he went to Rome to secure the emperor's favour, but reports had preceded him, impeaching him for his misrule. He was deposed, banished to Gaul, and afterwards died in Spain. Thus ended the reign of this poor worldling, while the power of Jesus whom he had set at nought, still grows and will until "He hath put all His enemies under His feet."

IX

BARABBAS OR CHRIST?

"Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ?"

—MATT. 27:17.

HEROD'S refusal to assume responsibility complicated matters. Pilate was again in a difficulty. To release the Prisoner meant risking a riot and all that involved; to condemn Him would gratify the rulers. And the Governor did not wish to do either. These conflicting forces were like two armies which had fought themselves to a standstill, without hope of a decision unless reinforcements came to one side or the other. Pilate felt he was in the grip of circumstances, and resorting to self-pity, he might have said with perfect relevance:

> "The time is out of joint; O cursèd spite,
> That ever I was born to set it right!"

He was not really concerned with the course of justice, and less with the cause of Christ. But for his own sake, he was extremely anxious to extricate himself from this position without giving the Jews an opportunity for either boasting or complaint. But as we have seen, irresolution dogged his steps.

Goethe commands assent when he says, "I respect the man who knows distinctly what he wishes. The greater part of all mischief of the world arises from the fact that men do not sufficiently understand their own aims." And in spite of himself, Pilate really wanted to let Jesus go.

Memory is proverbially erratic. Sometimes when we count on her help, she fails us miserably. At other times, she steps out of the shadows, and proffers her aid when it is least expected. It was so in Pilate's case. He suddenly recalled that among the many Jewish customs with which he had had to make himself acquainted, they had one which liberated an offender at the Passover. And the Procurator's face brightened at the thought. It was almost like an inspiration from those gods to which he gave scant reverence. His mind always worked swiftly when he sought an advantage over an opponent. At that very hour, there was a fellow who lay under sentence of death. It was the notorious Barabbas. He had given considerable trouble to the authorities as a brigand, and then as the leader of an insurrection. They had tracked him to his lair, only to find he had taken up new quarters. They lay ambushed in his usual sphere of operations, but again he outwitted his pursuers, resuming his activities elsewhere. At last, however, he was captured, and was summarily sentenced to be executed. Peaceful citizens heaved a sigh of relief. They had no sympathy with such a pest. He was not only a source of anxiety to the government—they could have forgiven that!—but he was also a menace to society. For the first time in Pilate's experience, he saw that the bandit could be of use.

Barabbas was the solution of his problem. He would submit an alternative to the crowd which did not really permit of any choice; and at one throw, he would not only gain his own point, but also score over the Elders as well. Pilate put the question to the people, though the answer he felt sure, was a foregone conclusion. "Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ?"

It was a dramatic situation, and the Procurator handled it with unerring instinct. Barabbas had been brought up from his cell, and now stood side by side with Jesus. At first, he thought that this summons means his execution was to be expedited. But now, listening to the Governor's proposal, he can scarcely believe his ears. We gaze on the scene, feeling the tremendous issues at stake. What will they do? Will they choose this repulsive fellow, naked to the waist, and manacled hand and foot? And as we look at him, conjectures arise regarding his origin and how he came to adopt a life of crime. Although the four Gospels mention him, and though the name of Barabbas is held in widespread horror, we know very little about him. An interesting theory affirms that his name was Jesus Barabbas; hence the care with which Pilate distinguished the Master as "Jesus which is called Christ." Origen cites this similarity in names. It is found in the Armenian, the Jerusalem Syriac, and some other versions. Yet the grounds on which it is based are inconclusive, and Origen does not give it any sanction. Professor David Smith, in *The Days of His Flesh,* however, takes the former position. "By a singular coincidence," he says, "the desperado's

name was Jesus. He was the son of one of the rabbis, and he was known generally, perhaps in wonderment at his fall, as Bar Abba—the son of the father, that is, the rabbi." In our opinion, it is more probable that while Barabbas may have belonged to one of the rabbinical families, the name, Jesus, was prefixed in error. A copyist repeated the last two letters of the preceding word. These were taken, as they could easily be, for an abbreviation of "Jesus." Then subsequently, they were included in the copy of some later writer in full.

That is unimportant, but from the materials at our disposal, we ascertain that Barabbas was a notable prisoner, who had been found guilty not only of sedition and insurrection, but also of robbery and murder. The former charges laid against him would not necessarily render him unpopular with the people. A revolutionary was regarded as a national hero. The Jews could not think of their conquerors ensconced in the city of David, or see the sentinels posted in their streets, without resentment. Besides, some of the great men of their past had been revolutionaries. Moses had headed an insurrection against the might of Egyptian tyranny. Elijah stood in courageous opposition to the licentious rites of Baal, even though they had royal sanction. And what shall be said of Judas Maccabeus? He occupied a place which none could rival. Even as Mattathias, his father, he had fought against the debasing practices which threatened to oust the pure worship of Jehovah. He had cleansed the defiled sanctuary, where swine had been offered on the altar. He battled fiercely and victoriously against the armed force sent to subdue

him. And even when he fell on the field of honour, he transmitted his spirit to his children's breasts. Were Barabbas merely a rebel against the established order of things, we repeat, he would have been in good company like Mazzini and Garibaldi, in national affairs; John Howard, Wilberforce, and Lincoln, in social reform; Luther, Calvin, and Melanchthon, in the religious sphere. Washington stands in the forefront of men who could not live unto themselves when oppression lifted its ugly head, and when the liberties of the people cried out for a champion. All such men are held in the highest esteem. No thought of personal gain actuated them. Their one desire was the common good.

But here they and Barabbas part company. He had used his patriotic schemes as a means to an end. His thought for his country did not exclude himself. Finding that he had fallen foul of the authorities, he continued his life of violence for its own sake. There were numerous bands of brigands who molested travellers on the lonely trade-routes, or who systematically laid the peasantry and merchant classes under tribute. And when Barabbas and his comrades needed supplies, they simply took what they wanted. This was followed even by murder, and now he and two of his companions awaited death. Whatever his family connections, the main body of the people had no pity for such a fellow. They knew him to be thoroughly bad. And Pilate was aware of this. That is why, in face of such detestation, he felt safe in making his proposal. The more so when he brought the two men together for purposes of comparison. The marks of moral degeneration on the face of Barabbas could

not be missed. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* there is a striking illustration of this. A youth of perfect manners and great wealth was the idol of his circle. A portrait of him, which hung in his home, was greatly admired by all who saw it. But he fell in with companions who led him into ways of indulgence and debauchery that had a strange effect, not on his own face, but on that of the portrait. It changed slowly but surely into the coarse and sensual. And at last he could stand it no longer. Returning from a further round of excess, he noted the dreadful face of the picture, and seizing a dagger, he stabbed furiously at the canvas. The next day, his friends found him lying before the portrait, the dagger in his own heart, but the canvas uninjured, showing the unsullied face of youth. But in real life, the face of the wrongdoer himself undergoes the change. In the British Museum, there are two busts of Nero. One shows him as he was at the commencement of his reign; the other is later. The latter reveals the alteration which bestiality, cruelty and self-indulgence leave on the human face. But not far away is another statue of Marcus Aurelius, showing serenity and strength. A lofty plane of life has an ennobling effect even on the countenance. And if such differences can be noted in insensient marble, would not the difference between the faces of Jesus and Barabbas be even more marked?

Pilate could not conceal his gratification at his own shrewd move. He had placed the priests where defeat was unescapable. At least, it might have been so had not his attention been diverted by that message from Procula. That gave the rulers their

chance. They had already divined the reason for this sudden regard for their rights and customs. Pilate was planning to release their Victim, and they were just as determined that He should not be freed. Clever though the Governor might think himself, he was no match for his antagonists. They incited the people to make their choice. But it was not of the Galilæan, whose hands had ever been stretched out in innumerable acts of mercy; it was that other, whose hands were red with blood, and who even now glared in wrath as he saw himself made a pawn in Pilate's game.

"Not this Man, but Barabbas!" Pilate started like one struck a savage blow. It was incredible! He had been so sure of success that he could hardly take in the words screamed in his ear. But plainly he did not understand the psychology of a mob. It was impossible to forecast their actions, for, one moment favourable, the next, they could be swept to the opposite extreme. Shakespeare sums it up by saying:

> ". . . I love the people,
> But I do not like to stage me to their eyes;
> Though it do well, I do not relish well
> Their loud applause and *Aves* vehement,
> Nor do I think the man of safe discretion
> That does affect it."

As the Governor listened to the rabble demanding that Jesus should be crucified in place of Barabbas, he showed his confusion. His arguments were a sure indication that he, whose word was ordinarily law, had been out-generalled. "Why, what evil hath He done?" It was in vain. His own convic-

tions, and the urgent counsel of his wife, were as straws before the tempestuous storm of anger and impatience that now swept the courtyard. "When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made," he bowed to the will of the people. Releasing Barabbas, he handed Jesus over to be scourged.

Free? Barabbas stepped down from the pavement like a man in a dream. He mingled with the spectators, some of whom were shouting in wild delight that they had compelled the pompous Governor to yield to their demands; others were calling out derisively after the retreating form of the Nazarene. Barabbas found himself the centre of a noisy group. With sundry playful blows, handclasps, and the like, they showered their congratulations on him. It was splendid to be so popular, and to be free again! His limbs seemed strangely light after the ponderous fetters. He wanted to leap, to laugh, to give way to his ebullient spirits. He was free, fêted, the idol of the rabble—and a short while before, he had been staring death in the face! One could never gauge the turn of Fortune's wheel. Then something snapped in his brain. He threw off the hands of the fawning folk about him, and thrusting them aside, strode through the crowd and forth into the city.

It was still early, and few people were about. Some shop-keepers were unfurling the faded awnings, or setting out their wares with leisurely hands. One or two pilgrims wandered aimlessly along, gazing at the narrow streets and maze of clustering houses, and wondering how any one could ever know his way about such a place. But Barabbas had no

eyes for these. He saw only one face. It had quickened memories which had lain sleeping in his soul. He saw the shame of his misspent years. Yet what struck him more forcibly was the irony of that morning's events. He did not know Jesus, though he had heard of His doings. They had nothing in common; their lives were the antipodes of each other. One was all graciousness and love; the other, violence and hate. One sought to give all He could for man's enrichment; the other took what he wanted, fearing neither God nor man. And how had Fortune rewarded them? Suffering and death for one; freedom and life for the other! Still . . .

Barabbas walked on through by-ways, thinking nothing of direction. There was no friendly door open to him. On the contrary, though he had been acquitted, he knew his life was far from safe. There were old scores by the hundred. Any one recognizing him might drive a knife into his back, or gathering help bear him down by sheer weight of numbers. He shuddered—and yet it was the thought of Jesus dying in his stead which disturbed him most. If only he could get some food, he would return to his resort amid the hills of Jordan. There he would meet his comrades, and set to work to recoup himself for lost time, and all he had endured. But he was hungry, and what was more, he seemed to lack energy to strike out to the old life. It was as though an angelic cordon had been drawn round him, and the way back closed by an impenetrable barrier.

The cries of excited people, and the noise of a bustling mob smote on his ear as he turned into

the main thoroughfare. He had made a circuit without knowing it, and as he caught the glint of the sun on shining lances and erect plumes, and then saw the top of a cross, he knew that though he had escaped the cross, he could not flee from its influence. He forgot his hunger. He might have said, "There, but for the grace of God, goes Barabbas!" but his impulse was to force his way through that jeering pack of bloodhounds, and demand to take what was his rightful place. For after all, though Fate had granted him the boon of life, was it worth having if he were to be tortured with remorse for all time? But the crowd had closed in on him, and the impulse passed. They did not recognize him, for their attention was fixed on the form in the distance, and the spectacle that awaited them. And hardly knowing why, Barabbas moved on to the Golgotha that had been meant for him.

While the three victims were being nailed down on their crosses, Barabbas hung back. He had good reasons for not wishing to go too near. Two of the victims knew him; but it was the third into whose face he shrank from looking. Word was somehow passed round that Barabbas was there, and he was dragged forward that he might share in the grim spectacle in which he had been destined to fill so large a place. The old evil self asserted itself. He laughed at the curses of his two former associates, swearing roundly at them in return. Then his eyes met those of the Man dying in his stead. He saw the lips move. That was more than he could endure. To hear Him add His reproaches to those of the other two was intolerable, and for the second time that day, Barabbas hurled himself upon his throng-

ing admirers, striking out right and left, and forced his way to solitude. No such word as he feared would have fallen from those sacred lips. Had the Saviour spoken to him, it would have been only some message that would have been as balm to a wounded spirit. The criminal could not know that, but remorse had now taken grip of his heart, and he hung on the farthest rim of the rabble, screened from observation by a few stunted bushes, waiting for he knew not what, and still unable to leave.

The sky grew ominously dark. There was a crash of thunder, and a thousand voices seemed to cry from the depths of his being, "Thou art the man!" He knew it! Sin had not destroyed all thought of past privileges. Memories of his father's remonstrances, his mother's prayers, seethed relentlessly through his mind. "For five talents of gold," said an ancient sage to one of his time, "I will teach thee the secret of remembering." "Ten talents shalt thou have," was the reply, "if thou wilt teach me to forget." And Barabbas would cheerfully have handed over all his treasure hoarded in the hills could he have found oblivion. Flinging himself on the ground, he hid his face in his hands, and tears to which his eyes had long been stranger, coursed down his cheeks.

The hours passed, and still he remained. He was roused by a hand upon his shoulder, and he looked up, startled. It was a woman. Her eyes were luminous with grief, and her voice gentle:

"Thou art Barabbas, art thou not? I have come to speak comfort to thee. My sorrow is great, but doubtless thine is greater. Jesus is dead!"

The uncouth fellow stumbled to his feet, and took

her hand understandingly. In some indefinable way, she reminded him of that mother of whom he had been thinking. She was about the age his mother had been when he quitted home for the last time; there was also the same, tender look in her face.

"Thou art His mother, perchance?"

"Nay, not His mother. My name is Joanna. I am the wife of Chuza, of Herod's household. Jesus came to us when our son lay stricken with mortal illness, and gave him back to us from the hand of death. He is my Saviour. . . ."

"And my Substitute!" Barabbas passed his hand across his eyes, and then said, "He died instead of me. I know now that it was unjust that He should suffer so. How He must hate one like me!"

"Or love thee! Knowest thou not that this is indeed the Christ? Some of us have sought to share His service for the common good. We have ministered to Him of our substance. Yet greater have been our privileges. We have heard His gracious words, and have seen Him bring relief and gladness to hearts burdened like thine. Yea, and He hath told His friends that He should suffer for the redemption of the race, so that the vilest might be cleansed, and the estranged be brought back to the heart of God."

Barabbas pressed the woman's hand. He tried to voice his gratitude, but no sound left his lips. He leapt forward like one whose bands were indeed severed, and sped down the hill as though joy had given winged sandals to his feet. Whither did he go? Was it back to the home where two aged folk sat solitary in the evening of life, that he might tell them of his new-found hope? We cannot tell.

As his form was swallowed up in the gloom of that memorable afternoon, so his tracks are covered over by the dust of the centuries.

Yet we may find his counterpart in fiction. Jean Valjean, that striking figure in *Les Miserables,* a convict released from the galleys, found his way shadowed by his own black past. Man's inhumanity maddens him. But he comes at length to the house of a saintly bishop, where he is treated with hospitable kindness. As they sit at the table together, and he notes the way in which he has been received, he says with deep earnestness, "You are good, and do not despise me. You receive me as a friend, and yet I have not hidden from you whence I come, and that I am an unfortunate fellow." The bishop gently touched his hand. "You need not have told me who you were. This is not my house, but the house of Christ. This door does not ask a man who enters whether he has a name, but if he has a sorrow; you are suffering, you are hungry and thirsty, and so be welcome. . . . Why do I want to know your name? Besides, before you told it to me, you had one which I knew." "Is that true? You know my name?" "Yes," the bishop answered. "You are my brother!" The work of redemption had only begun. During the night, unable to resist the temptation, Valjean stole the silver plate, only to be arrested and brought back at daylight. But instead of taking his property from the gendarmes, the old bishop reached for the two silver candlesticks with which the table had been adorned the night before, and handing them also to the bewildered man, he said, quietly but authoritatively, "Jean Valjean, my brother, you no longer belong to evil, but to good. I

have bought your soul of you. I withdraw it from black thoughts and the spirit of perdition, and I give it to God."

That was the turning-point in the convict's life; and truth is stranger than fiction. "There are cases, I grant you," writes Mrs. Humphry Ward, "cases of impenitent wickedness—where the higher law is suspended, finds no chance to act. . . . But the higher law is always there. If love has the smallest room to work, if forgiveness can find the narrowest foothold, love and forgiveness are imposed upon, demanded of, the Christian." And we may add, they are also required of the Divine heart. Barabbas could not look into the face of Christ without feeling the intensity of His compassion, nor without realizing that he no longer belonged to evil, but to good. Christ had died for him; henceforth he must live for Christ. While only in a physical sense did Jesus die for him, yet in a larger and truer sense He died for all. He identified Himself with man in his misery and shame. Paul declares that truth with the utmost conviction. The Lord of glory laid aside His kingly state humbling Himself to man's need, and assuming the nature of the race estranged. He lived out the perfect life of obedience, revealing not only what God is like, but what man himself ought to be. Through years of patient labour, and through the days of His public ministry, "the beauty of holiness" gleamed on His brow. Then in one unique sacrifice, He demonstrated both God's hatred of sin, and His matchless love for the sinful. Peter puts it: "He suffered, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God," even as by His revelation, He had brought God to us. It was not that

the Innocent suffered in order that the guilty might escape, as in the case of Barabbas. It was rather that, sin's consequences removed, and Love's sacrifice for the soul thus offered, man might know the tenderness of God, and be won from disobedience and shame to a life of fellowship and joy. Making peace for us through the blood of His cross, in that sense Christ is our Substitute, for with His stripes we are healed.

Yet now, the position seems to be reversed. Instead of Christ being the substitute for man, man seeks a substitute for Christ. At least, that is a fair construction to place on the vogue which various cults enjoy. We may observe, in passing, that though they may try to displace Christ, they cannot replace Him. Test any of them in certain directions. What they offer that is pure, lovely, and of good report, is already found in fullest degree in Jesus Christ. Can any give us a loftier concept of life than Jesus gave? "In Him was light, and the life was the light of men." Can they give us a nobler concept of God? "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." Can they break the power of sin, give a new dynamic to life, or, apart from the Christian revelation, yield a more satisfying and sane faith in immortality? Without being unduly dogmatic, we affirm that, tested in these ways, they are all found wanting. There is no real substitute for Christ. Yet He is kept still at the bar of public opinion awaiting man's choice between Himself and Barabbas. The history of modern times shows how again the man of violence is chosen rather than the Man of love. Nations have allowed themselves to be dragged behind the armoured chariot of the

militarist, and the simple counsel of Cowper has gone unheeded:

> "War's a game, which, were their subjects wise,
> Kings would not play at. Nations would do well
> To extort their truncheons from the puny hands
> Of heroes, whose infirm and baby minds
> Are gratified with mischief, and who spoil
> Because men suffer it, their toy, the world."

Men have permitted unworthy standards to be set up in the market-place often in spite of their better judgment. The Barabbas of greed and dishonesty has been acclaimed by the crowd, and even those who disapprove, have yet been shouted down in the name of expediency rather than make themselves unpopular by asserting their own views with too much insistence. Only as the great, sad world, burdened with its needs and its feeling of inadequacy, turns to Him, can it discover that "this Man shall be our peace." Happily, however, there is a growing number of those who, even as at Calvary, discern the true value of the Saviour of men. They know what He has done for them, and what He can accomplish. Their faith is contagious. Others are being brought to see that Love is an eternal factor in the universe. And when the Sermon on the Mount becomes practical politics, a solution will be found for world problems. Then shall the race no longer give its suffrages to Barabbas, but to Jesus which is called Christ.

X

THE CROSS-BEARER

"They compel one Simon, a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country . . . to bear His cross."

—MARK 15:21.

THE excited mob which left the Prætorium, having made Pilate yield to its imperious demands, set out for the Hill. It surged like impotent waves against the bulwark of steel encircling Jesus. Then it divided at the city gates. Some of the people ran ahead to get through first; the rest were thrust aside, and must perforce wait till the guard passed on. Wildly gesticulating, they yelled their ribald jests at the figure within the lines of spears. But with unbroken step, the column marched on, down the sloping way, through the gates, and out beyond. Not a gleam of interest showed in the immobile faces of the soldiers. Moving with measured precision, they kept their way, where the ground began to climb to Golgotha. Suddenly, an order rang out. The column halted. The Prisoner had collapsed; the weight of the cross was too much for Him. That is easily understood. The real humanity of our Lord is indisputable. It was Friday, and He had not slept since the Wednesday night. He was weak from loss of blood as well as of sleep.

Since the paschal meal early on the previous evening, He had eaten nothing. To all of which must be added the long and agonizing ordeal through which He had passed. What that hour in Gethsemane meant, none could know but the Saviour who came to redeem the race. But even that was not all which filled His cup. There had been the trials, the lying accusations and hatred, the scourging that laid open His sacred back—surely enough to weaken the stoutest frame! But it was not the actual weight of the cross, but its spiritual significance which made it so grievous a load. And He sank in His tracks.

The patience of the centurion was limited. If Jesus could not carry the cross, some one must! But no Jew would touch the accursed thing; the Feast was at hand, and he would incur defilement. No Roman could; it were unthinkable for those who had to uphold the dignity of the conqueror. That is obvious from Mark's Gospel. "They compel one Simon, a Cyrenian, to bear His cross." At once we are interested in this man. How came he to be there at the psychological moment, and why was he selected? The fact that he is described as a Cyrenian is significant. Cyrene was a city of North Africa, and the capital of a province lying between Carthage and Alexandria. It corresponded roughly with what is now Tripoli. Originally a Greek settlement, after the Jewish Dispersion it became populated with Hebrews. They formed such a large part of the community that Alexander gave them equal rights of citizenship with the Greek population, and ultimately trade sprang up between Cyrene and Jerusalem. A number of merchants became

resident in the Holy City, and a synagogue was set apart for their specific use.

Though this does not answer our question about Simon, it leads us towards a conclusion. If he were from Africa, his appearance would be sufficiently striking to attract the officer's attention. An Arab in native garb walking through the streets of London or New York would not be as conspicuous as Simon was. He did not look in the least like a Jewish pilgrim, and therefore would not have any susceptibilities to offend. So seeming to be a suitable man for the purpose, he is roughly led between the files of the cohort. The cross is adjusted on his back, and the procession resumes its way. But now the piteous wailing of women is heard. Moved by the suffering of the Victim, they lift their voices in lament. Perhaps there were some in that group whose children had felt that Divine hand laid in blessing on their heads; perchance, some whose dear ones had been restored to health, or given back from the grisly hold of death. But Jesus bids them not to weep for Him, but rather shed penitential tears for their land with its iniquities. He is beyond human aid; but their prayers may yet avail for their callous nation.

The sinews of Simon are more than equal to their task, and through the dust flung up by the crowd, at last, panting, he lays the cross down on Calvary's crest. And as he wipes the perspiration from his brow, he sees that he, with the three who have now been brought to execution, are surrounded by the soldiers. The mob is kept at bay while the victims are stretched out, and the nails driven home; but Simon is a privileged onlooker. The crosses are

lifted up by stout arms, set in position, and the ground trodden firmly about the base of each. A quaternion together with the centurion is left in charge, while the centuria, under the command of a junior officer, marches back. Then the rabble bursts in, eager to enjoy itself without restraint.

How long Simon remained near the cross we cannot say, but he was in a position to see and hear everything. The anger of the rulers and the stoicism of the soldiers, would be flung into violent contrast with the patience of Jesus. What effect would all this have upon this man who had been, so unceremoniously, made one of the chief actors in the drama? Is it possible to say? Though he was a native of Cyrene, he was also a Jew, and had come to Jerusalem for the Passover. This also indicates a spiritual enquirer. He had renounced the faith of his forebears, and had embraced Judaism. That was an advance on anything he had known. Perhaps he became aware of a disparity between precept and practice as he came in contact with the religious life of the capital. But he was a traveller on the road of truth, and his destination lay beyond the unsatisfactory inns of human fallibility. However, he had come to observe the solemn Feast. His lodging was outside the city. The phrase, "coming out of the country," proves that, as well as the fact that, to one of his race, accustomed to open spaces, the high buildings and narrow streets of the city would be unbearable. Besides, accommodation was at a premium within the walls themselves.

But did he know anything of Jesus before that hour? Perhaps he had listened to the gossip of the previous evening. His fellow-pilgrims, a pro-

miscuous company, gathered for a while under the roof of this hostelry, had much to say of this Galilæan Teacher. With unrestrained merriment, one told how He had equalized matters with the cheating money-changers in the Temple. Another told of the marvellous cures He was reputed to have wrought. But a third, admitting that Jesus had silenced His critics, hazarded the opinion that they would yet prove too strong even for Him. Let Him fall into the hands of the implacable Annas, and there would be little hope for Him!

Of course, they did not know what had already taken place. The secret moves had been too jealously guarded. But when Simon came on that turbulent crowd outside the gates, and asked some the name of this Man who was being led to execution, he was staggered. It was the Nazarene—the very Man they had been discussing! And then he, of all men, was made to carry the cross. Never was his strength used to such an end; never had such an honour—as it was yet to prove—come his way. Though men might revile him, might count this the grossest indignity that could be laid on a human creature, it was to be ultimately the highest honour mortal man could know—to share the travail of the Son of God.

So much for the Cyrenian, but what resulted from his deed? If he were a stranger in Jerusalem, it is surely singular that the writers of the Gospels knew his name! We look at him again, standing by the cross, striving to readjust what he had heard of Jesus with what Jesus had said to him. Then our Lord spoke to this man as they journeyed towards the mount of anguish? That is beyond doubt. He

who commended the cup of cold water, who gave His word of grateful appreciation to the woman who poured out her spikenard on His feet, who had a message of comfort for the weeping daughters of Jerusalem, could not walk silent beside this man who had rendered such timely aid. Christ's surcharged heart would go out to this burly fellow who bore the cross. About what He said we dare not even speculate. The fact that the Evangelists are silent shows how sacred Simon felt that word to be. But love captured his rugged soul. And he lingered by the side of the Crucified. Yet seeing the disdainful looks of those who:

> "Drew back their garment's hem
> For fear of defilement,"

the curious gaze of others who scorned him for the assistance he had rendered, he turned away. He had become uneasy. Unwittingly, he had been an accomplice. He had helped to crucify this Man. Suppose it were, as the crowd mockingly suggested, the wondrous Messiah so long expected? He had passed beyond the taunting Elders and the bawling spectators. His soul was sick, and he was undecided whether to resume his way to the city, or to remain until he had seen the end, when he heard some one speaking.

"Art thou not he who carried the cross?" The speaker had a Galilæan accent, and concluding this was a sympathizer of Jesus, at once Simon took up the defensive, suspecting summary vengeance.

"Truly, but it was under compulsion of the soldiers that . . ."

"That thou didst lighten His load, while I but made it heavier!" The speaker flung up his arms with a gesture of despair. "Thou canst not understand what I mean. Thou art a stranger here, art thou not? What is thy name?"

"My name is Simon; I am of Cyrene."

"Simon? My name is Simon also—Simon Peter—and I was of His company, but now . . . Come, let us talk together."

Between the two men who had something in common, it is not surprising if a warm and enduring friendship sprang up. They both had been in the company of Christ; they had each had a part in that sorrowful hour; and though for different reasons, both felt they were outcasts from the pale of decent men. But best of all, there was a deep affection for Jesus in the souls of both. And that explains why we have these particulars of Simon the Cyrenian—he became a disciple of Jesus Christ. The cross-bearer developed into a witness of the truth to which he had been so strangely led.

What singular blessings come along the line of God's providences. Sometimes our plans, like those of Simon, are thwarted, and obstacles impede our progress along the path we chose. Our course is altered without any reason we can adduce. But "the steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord." When Simon was delayed by the passing throng, his first feeling may have been one of annoyance, but therein was revealed God's purpose. Nor was his the only case. "Man proposes; God disposes," quotes the author of the *Imitatio*. There is ample proof of that. David Livingstone originally proposed to go to China, but God chose Africa. Duff

selected Africa, Alexander Mackay wished to go to Madagascar, while that great apostle of China, Griffith John, planned to give his life to India. But when the heart is willing to obey the leading of Christ, then the highest good is accomplished.

Dr. Marcus Dods, a brilliant man of parts, felt the call to the ministry. He swept every other consideration aside, and set himself to prepare for that arduous task. But when his course was at length completed, there were years of bitter disappointment. Though he had that inward conviction that God had thus summoned him to this high calling, no church invited him to become its minister during all those years of waiting. Yet he remained constant to his mission, and in the end, gloriously vindicated the faith which had kept him true.

One of the most gifted members of the Anglican Church was nearly lost to its pulpit. We refer to the revered F. W. Robertson, of Brighton. He came of military stock; his father was a soldier, as his grandfather had been. His brothers were all engaged in the same profession, and at last the day came when he also could take the same step. He was gazetted to the 3rd Dragoon Guards, and doubtless his feeling was that to this end he was born, and for this cause had he come into the world. But a higher goal, for which he was certainly fitted by God, came in sight. An insistent summons sounded in his heart: he felt called to the service of the church. Why had not the call come earlier, when it would have been so much easier to decide? That was not the point which weighed with him. He divested himself of his uniform, and laid aside the sword he had been so ambitious to wear. With

it, he surrendered all his plans and his career in the army. The only things he took with him into his new vocation were the fortitude, steadfastness, and high sense of duty, which characterized his life. The call to the cross was a challenge; strength to respond came with it. The latent greatness of his soul sprang into activity, and he reaped his unfading reward.

Simon, the cross-bearer, was called forth to a larger service by the commissioning Spirit. He had been faithful in that which was least; he should have an opportunity of showing his sterling worth in other ways. There is a lovely legend which says that when Jesus had completed His work on earth, the angel Gabriel asked Him, "What plans hast Thou made, Lord, for carrying on Thy ministry? How are all men to know what Thou hast done?" "I left it to Peter, and James, and John, and Martha and Mary, to tell their friends, and their friends to tell their friends, until the whole world has heard," replied Jesus. "But suppose Peter is so busy with his nets, and Martha so full of her housework, or the friends they tell so occupied, that they forget to tell their friends, how can the whole world hear?" Then Jesus said, "I have not made any other plans; *I am counting on them!*" And Simon was one on whom the Master was depending. Though he might not tell of what had passed between Christ and himself, he must speak of the love awakened in his soul, and the discovery he had made. As he had first passed from the gloom of his own religion to the dim dawn of Judaism, so he had been led into the glorious light of the Sun of Righteousness.

The story of the Christian Church warrants that statement. We find that in Antioch there were some "men of Cyprus and Cyrene . . . preaching the Lord Jesus" (Acts 11:20). A little later, the names of some of those who were at work are given: "Barnabas, and *Simeon that was called Niger,* and Lucius, of Cyrene." This affords two interesting facts. One is that Simon, or Simeon as he is styled here, had become a preacher of the Gospel to those of his own tongue. The other furnishes a hint of that which made him so conspicuous that day when a cross-bearer was sought—"Simeon that is called *Niger.*" Even if he were not as black as an African, he would be more swarthy than the people around him, and he would thus be noted as a man on whom such a hateful duty could be laid without protest.

Simon's satisfaction in his discipleship was not only in its effect upon himself, but also on his family. Mark describes him as "the father of Alexander and Rufus." The names are given without any explanation as to their position. The inference is that they were well-known. This is worthy of note. Who were these two young men? Alexander was one of Paul's associates. They were together in Ephesus, and when the riot broke out with the resounding shouts of "Great is Diana of the Ephesians," it was Alexander who stepped forth to endeavour to appease the anger of the populace. When we turn to the Epistle to the Romans, among the various salutations with which the letter concludes, we read, "Salute Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine." That indicates that not only was Rufus prominent in the church there,

but also that his mother had been of such service to the Apostle that he regarded her almost as a mother.

The data are insufficient, yet we venture to reconstruct the course of events following the crucifixion. Simon, having joined the company of the Apostles, was perhaps among those who waited for the anointing of the Holy Spirit. His way was clearly defined. He could no longer continue his ordinary avocation after being the cross-bearer of Christ. He must devote his life to spreading the story of Calvary. His wife and their two sons yield their hearts to Christ, and in due course, Alexander and Rufus take up the same noble mission. Their mother's gifts were of a quieter order, but she rendered effectual service to the cause, as Paul's reference shows. So Simon's brief fellowship had far-reaching results. He did not know the tremendous significance of what he had done for the stricken Saviour. The cloud of tragedy overspread him in that hour. He had no choice in what he did, we admit; yet as a duty required of him, he did it willingly. "Our whole happiness and power of energetic action," says Ruskin, "depend on our being able to breathe and live in the cloud; content to see it opening here and there; rejoicing to catch through the thinnest films of it, glimpses of stable and substantial things; but yet perceiving a nobleness even in concealment." That has peculiar force for those who, like Simon, are called to take up the cross and follow Christ. The cross is not only the symbol of sacrificial service, as it became the badge of the Crusaders; it is also the pledge of victory. Before the battle of Milvium Bridge, Constantine saw a

vision. He beheld a cross shining in the sky, and a voice seemed to say, "By this conquer!" The Roman eagles on his standards were supplanted by the cross. And it is by the cross of Jesus Christ, and by that only, that the world can be won for Him. Blessing will inevitably follow as night is swallowed up in day. It will flood our own hearts, as in the case of Simon; it will also flow to others in ever-increasing volume. For next to the privilege of serving his Master in that hour of need, was the joy that those who were dearest to him had also been called to be the means of enriching other hearts and spreading the Saviour's sway.

Not in one sublime act of faith alone, but all through life, are we called to this high service. It combines duty and privilege. And there is this to remember for our encouragement: he who bears the cross of Christ walks by the side of the Master Himself. Can we then be discouraged when the day is long, and the progress slow? "Remember, if you lose heart about your work," counsels Charles Kingsley, "that none of it is lost; that the good of every good deed remains, and breeds, and works on for ever; and all that fails and is lost is the outside shell of the thing, which, perhaps, might have been better done, but better or worse has nothing to do with the real spiritual good which you have done to men's hearts, for which God will surely repay you in His own way and time." Can it be that we have narrowed down our Master's meaning when He bade all men take up that cross of daily denial and faithful endurance? We have, naturally, become so accustomed to think of it in the light of His, that we make it synonymous with suffering and privation.

It is taken up in the dull spirit of resignation as something which cannot be avoided. Yet that is not the entire meaning of His challenging word. To Simon, it was an experience that blossomed into luscious fruit. It certainly shut him off from the old ways of life. The plans he formed for that morning were completely reversed. And God's providences sometimes mean reversal. Yet every reverse is big with opportunity for something greater. Life commenced in that hour! Admittedly, cross-bearing may bring at first limitation; then, eventually, the cross becomes no more a burden to the devoted heart than wings are to a bird, and power to soar may be ours. Strength and moral maturity are thus brought within reach of the soul. We need not shrink from anything of God's ordaining. His wisdom would not permit, His love could not allow, anything that cannot be turned to the fullest blessing. And so "E'en though it be a cross that raiseth me" the heart can exult. It stands for privilege as well as responsibility, service and companionship as well as suffering; and with the sublime optimism of Whittier each may declare:

"Others shall sing the song,
Others shall right the wrong,
Finish what I begin,
And all I fail of, win.
What matter, I or they!
Mine or another's day,
So the right word is said,
And life the sweeter made?"

XI

THE CHRIST OF CALVARY

"And when they were come to the place which is called Calvary, there they crucified Him."

—LUKE 23:33.

THAT love with which God so loved the world is too wonderful for human language to express. There are depths in the Pacific that have not yet been sounded. There are deeps in the ocean of Divine love that must ever remain unplumbed. All we have seen of human ingratitude as Jesus was hounded to death, coupled with what we know of man's wickedness, moves us to ask, Why should God love a world like this? The modern man is disillusioned, and makes no secret of the fact. He once cherished high ideals. Indeed, he believed in the heroic qualities of chivalry, sacrificial service for others, and the subordinating of self to some great aim. But now things are different. He feels there is no end to the misery and wretchedness of humanity. Cut off one evil, and the hydra-headed monster which threatens human welfare reappears in another direction. Uproot this form of tyranny or that, and a score of new iniquities spring up. The world itself is beautiful enough, but the people in it . . . ! There is so much requiring an explanation. Cruel wrongs are perpetrated, and the evil-

doer goes scot-free. Unscrupulous men succeed, and the righteous go to the wall. Strife and struggle, toil and tears, are never far removed from man's lot. And is it possible for God to love the world? As the thoughtful know only too well, they have failed a thousand times to keep faith with the highest. And if man is disappointed with himself, how much more must God grieve over human declension and failure! If he who has striven and fallen comes to loathe himself for his wrong-doing, how much more serious is the evil of those who not only commit wickedness, but persistently plan some new villainy? And yet this is the world which God gave His Son to redeem! It seems incredible.

It may seem so, yet nothing is impossible with God except acquiescence in things as they are. The Divine Father could not placidly regard man's rebellion, nor can He, being Holy Love, remain inactive. While we often find it difficult to discriminate between the sinner and his sin, God does. That prophet who described the unfathomable love of God as akin to a mother's affection for her child brings us within sight of the truth. There is a bond binding God to man. The babe which lies tossing in the grip of disease, its little face distorted with pain, is a parable of the race. Its suffering brings anguish to the heart watching by its bed. And while all that skill and sympathy can do is being done, love is yet the mainspring. So the Father looks on the havoc sin has wrought, and His heart grieves for, as well as suffers with, its victims. In spite of its sinfulness, God's love centres on the race, and where sin abounds, grace abounds yet more. Whatever may be said, the world cannot do without God.

The waif of the city streets, lashed by the pitiless rain, hungry and cold, is the more pitiable because he has no heart to which he can turn for sympathy and succour. Such is man when he has permitted evil to estrange him from his Father. He did not understand fully the consequences of his evil choice when first he spurned the good, and took to ways of sin. But like the mountain torrent that slowly carves its course, there is a gradual widening and deepening of its bed until communication with the two banks is impossible. We have seen sin dividing man from his fellow. Coleridge describes two such separated lives:

> "They stood aloof, the scars remaining,
> Like cliffs that had been rent asunder;
> A dreary sea now flows between;
> But neither heat, nor frost, nor thunder,
> Shall wholly do away, I ween,
> The marks of that which once hath been."

Yet if the severance be between God and man, how can the love of the Father allow His sons to go their way to even deeper shame and despair? He is compassionate because He is love. And love must sacrifice itself for the sake of its beloved.

We turn to Greek mythology for an illuminating picture. Prometheus, beholding from high Olympus the suffering sons of men in the world below, was moved to feel for their unhappy lot. The gods cared little how men strove for peace and happiness. So he bore fire from heaven, and kindled on the dark earth those glowing hopes that gave new courage for the conflict with nature and evil. Zeus was angry. He commanded that Prometheus should

be punished for his undignified sympathy with the forlorn. His sentence was that the unhappy god should be impaled on a rock, where a vulture should tear his vitals, and where in torture he must expiate his offence. But when they crucified Jesus on Calvary, He suffered not for His own offence, as did Prometheus, but on account of the sins of others. He came not because of the anger of the Deity, but because of His infinite love. He came, not as the Schoolmen taught in the Middle Ages, to pay a price to the offended Father so that He would look favourably on His sinful children. We see how false that is of One whose heart was filled with grieved yet profoundest love. But as Paul unhesitatingly affirms, Christ was the revelation of the Divine tenderness towards those who were estranged. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." And as the Fourth Gospel says, "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son."

We need not ask how it is possible for the finite to comprehend the Infinite. In spite of the familiar maxim of John Stuart Mill, God is not the Unknowable. He has revealed Himself in Jesus as the giver is often shown in the gift. And the Father's heart is laid bare. There is a poignant passage in one of Guy Thorne's books. Sir Basil Speke, one of the most distinguished judges of the King's Bench, was bitterly disappointed in his son, and he says, "God knows, I try to look on the bright side of things. But despair comes over me only too often. One or other of my colleagues on the bench is always coming up to me, and telling me of some victory won by a son. 'My young rascal got his first in Greats,

Speke; 'pon my word, I'm more nervous about it than I was over my own degree examination.' Or else, 'My lad was at Windsor last week with his chief—the secretaries always go, you know—and the King spoke to him, and said he had heard very well of him from Sir Henry. Very satisfactory, was it not?' And I have to congratulate some beaming old fellow, with a sick heart. I can't very well turn round and say, 'Well, my young rascal has just been sent down from Oxford for drink and gambling!' "

That is only an imperfect portrait of a human father, but it bears a distinct resemblance to the Divine. In both cases, there is a parent's heart, heavy with disappointment and sorrow. Yet where the human may break down under the strain, the Divine love persists. Where the former may be unable to awaken a better life, the latter, like the warm kiss of the sun in Spring, may stir the clods, and woo the dormant life to beauty and fragrance. For God is patient, as well as powerful. He sees possibilities of good where our eyes discern nothing of promise, and the work of redemption may produce marvellous effects where grace is allowed to operate. There is a wonderful painting of the Madonna and the Child in a gallery in Italy. It is from the brush of Raphael, and is the more fascinating because of its halo of romance. When Napoleon captured Milan, and then advanced on Bergamo, the art treasures of both places were collected by his orders, and despatched to Paris. But to save this cherished canvas from such a fate, an artist swiftly painted a crude landscape over the original. It was such a poor thing that the picture

was passed over as valueless. The artist, with becoming modesty, had not signed his work, and in the confusion of later times, the priceless Raphael was lost. It was not until many years had elapsed that the hastily applied colours, probably to the dismay of the man who had acquired it, began to crack and peel. Then, to the astonishment of art lovers, the masterpiece was discovered. It was restored, and now the fair faces of the Virgin and her Son look out in serene beauty from the gallery of Bergamo.

To some extent that explains God's love for the race. It shows why Christ had such compassion for the poor, defiled creatures round Him during His ministry, and thronging about His cross. The Pharisees could see nothing of value in these men and women whom Jesus loved. But He discerned the real worth of the soul, and the beauty of the Godlike beneath the flaming hues of passion, and the sombre shades of sorrow and sin. Like the loving hands which restored that Raphael, Christ brought back the glow of spiritual health to those long dead in trespasses and sins. Our Father is mirrored for us by Jesus in various ways. The shepherd scouring the bleak mountain in quest of the sheep which was lost; the woman turning her room out, searching for the piece of silver; the father of the Prodigal, unable to sleep, and pacing the roof after dark, praying constantly for his son's return, even while he pictured to himself the excesses into which the boy had fallen—these all make plain the love which passes knowledge.

Yet Calvary shows the climax of human perversity. Those who had thus taken the Son of God, nailing Him to the cross, did not do so in utter

ignorance. Their light may not have been as clear as our own. But they had been prepared for the coming of the Messiah by the saints and seers of the past. They had heard for themselves the gracious message of love, till, time after time, they wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. They had seen mighty works done, the like of which had never been known. Lepers were cleansed, the blind received their sight, even the dead were raised to life. Christ had made His appeal to such works, for even His critics admitted that He had wrought these miracles before them. But when thus confronted with indisputable proof of the power He wielded, there was this way of evading the issue: such works were done by the agency of evil spirits. It did not seem to occur to them that the spirit of evil was not likely to express itself in kindliness and good. And so, in spite of all which might have led them into the light, they chose the darkness of their own perverse ways, and "there they crucified Him." In vain, apparently, had the Good Father tried to speak to the human heart! Not only in daily provision and daily reminders of Himself,—though each morning might have gladdened the heart with its dew-spangled flowers, or the matin song of the bird upon the swaying branch, —but in that superb life had the message come, rebuking what was low, awakening aspiration for what was pure and noble. Jack London writes of one who was thus moved by the exalted soul of a woman. "No word, nor clue, nor hint of the Divine had ever reached him before. He had never believed in the Divine. He had always been irreligious, scoffing. Her purity smote him like a blow. It startled him.

He had known good or bad, but purity as an attribute of existence he had never known. His mood was essentially religious. He was humble and meek, filled with self-disparagement and amazement. In such a frame of mind sinners come to the penitent form. He was convicted of sin." And yet those who were privileged to be God's ministers in the Temple, those who were children of the Covenant, those who had looked on the unique life of Jesus, the Christ, were unmoved, impenitent, uninspired? Surely in that hour, if never before, they might have been led into the light. Rousseau makes a telling comparison between Christ and Socrates. "What a difference," he exclaims, "between the son of Sophroniscus and the Son of Mary! Socrates dies with honour, surrounded by his disciples listening to the most tender words—the easiest death that one could wish to die. Jesus dies in pain, dishonoured, mocked, the object of universal cursing—the most horrible death which one could fear. At the receipt of the cup of poison, Socrates blesses him who could not give it him without tears; Jesus while suffering the sharpest pains, prays for His most bitter enemies. If Socrates lived and died like a philosopher, Jesus lived and died like a God."

Calvary is the consummation of Christ's mission to mankind. There is no real comparison between the death of Socrates and that of our Saviour, for the reason that He was the world's Redeemer. He offered in His life a representative obedience as the head of a new humanity. And in His sacrificial death, He proved that love is mightier than hate, and God's unfathomed affection greater than even man's waywardness and folly. In Him, the

alienated were reconciled; the dread and misunderstanding engendered by sin were removed. There was no bitterness, no hate of the sinner in God's fatherly heart; only love—love which burned at white heat against all that is evil and detrimental to man's highest welfare, yet love which draws into happy fellowship and saintly living.

Far from being conquered by His opponents, Christ was the conqueror. His pity and His prayers for them indicate that. But even more clearly is that seen in His triumphant resurrection and His growing power in the world. In spite of all that the pessimist may say and the statistician adduce, there never was a time when men's hearts were more willing to exchange the weariness and unsatisfactoriness of the present day for the glorious liberty of Christ's rule. And though the hour of His coronation may be far distant, the Christian heart can toil on with firm faith and undaunted courage, knowing that the conquering and unconquerable Christ shall be lifted up. He shall draw all men unto Him, and His dominion shall be from sea to sea.

XII

THE TWO MALEFACTORS

"There they crucified Him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left."

—Luke 23:33.

THE cross of Christ, towering o'er the wrecks of time, dominates the other two. That is not surprising. Reverent eyes are drawn to the superb figure in the midst, for love's crowning sacrifice is there, and the heart is filled with adoring wonder. The main purpose of the Evangelists was to limn that central character, so that the heartless might be moved, and the devout be inspired with deeper faith. So the significance of the other two has been sometimes missed. That was hate's master-stroke, the chief indignity it could lay upon Jesus. The Scribes and Pharisees had done their utmost to goad the Master into saying or doing something unworthy of Himself. They had signally failed. They sought to make Him appear a Man of ridiculous pretensions, of impossible claims, and ludicrous presumption. Yet the robe of the aspirant with which Herod decked Him, the raiment of a king in which Pilate's men arrayed Him, did not produce the desired effect. The majesty of that sublime manhood remained undimmed. So with a touch of fiendishness, it was arranged that Christ should be

crucified in company with these two notorious characters awaiting execution.

The plans of the priests had been carefully laid. The demand for Barabbas had been born not in the minds of the people, but in those of the Elders. And the request that Jesus should be crucified hints at a deeply-laid plot. Certainly, it was not mere coincidence. And although Pilate, having consented to have Jesus put to death, seemed as though he were content to let them have their way, it remained with the rulers to waive their right to have this Man, who had been tried in their courts, put to death by stoning according to their own law.

Early on that eventful day, the two malefactors were prepared for their fate. Possibly, in the circumstances, discipline was relaxed, and they were informed by their jailor that Barabbas had been released. Yet his soul was blacker than theirs! He had been the prime mover in every dastardly deed of which they had been found guilty. It was his evil genius that had planned the violence for which they were to pay the extreme penalty.

Dysmas turned to his fellow-prisoner. "What thinkest thou of that, Gestas?" (We use the traditional names.)

Gestas spat viciously on the floor of his cell. "That there is no justice in the world! To think that the gods, if such there be, should favour a scoundrel like Barabbas! Why should he escape and we suffer? Reprieved! . . ." He turned to the jailor, leaning against the bars. "Who is this Man who takes his place?"

"A Galilæan; some simple fellow who, they say, hath been posing as a king. Methought as I saw

Him before Pilate that He were unlike any king I have ever seen. I cannot believe that He said He was such. They accuse Him of deceiving the people! Then the people are easily deceived if that be so. But more like it is those pestilent priests; they have some spite against Him. And the Governor—well, he is like unto a figure of clay in their hands. Why, I know not. Still, it is this Jesus who is to be thy companion in the festive scene of this day. Hist! here comes the officer of the guard."

The human being is lost in the officious jailor in an instant. The officer and his quaternion have come to take charge of their prisoners. The barred gate is thrown open. The two wretched criminals are led into the courtyard, where their crosses are hoisted on their backs, and the guard forming about them, they are marched off to await the other Prisoner at Calvary. There are few people to notice them in the streets. Attention had been diverted elsewhere. They feel aggrieved; the old spirit of bravado still burns in them. But they grunt out their curses on Barabbas as they toil up the slopes of the hill. That fellow was ever the favourite of Fortune, and to think that he should thus evade the fate he so richly merited!

Such was the mood of the malefactors. There was no penitence for their wrong-doing; not even pity as they saw Jesus draw painfully towards them. Even when the cruel nails tore their way through the quivering flesh, and when, in horrible torture, they were lifted on the crosses, these two were filled with hate. It was hate of the jeering rabble, hate of that injustice which had freed the other, and

unreasoning hate of the Man who had taken his place. And this was the end of a life of crime? But it had a beginning. Those faces now distorted with suffering were once kissed by a mother's lips. Those feet nailed in shameful impotence after running the ways of bloodshed, had once been taught with loving care how to walk. Can we turn the pages of life and ready the story of their youth? Within reasonable limits, let the imagination circle about their early years.

He on the right, designated Dysmas, may have had a good home. All that parental love and piety could do had been tried. But he grew up headstrong and wilful. His father's advice was rejected as unnecessary; his mother's tearful protests were regarded as effeminate and only to be despised. In vain the rabbi had expostulated with him; he was careless and indifferent. Just as he had declined to learn his lessons in boyhood, so he refused to master the details of the simple craft to which he was sent. And when the workshop was closed for the day, instead of returning home, he would consort with some older than himself. They too were idle. Depending on their parents for their daily needs, they drifted deeper into ways of sloth and heedlessness. One youth was Gestas. He had lost his father and mother while still young. He was a ne'er-do-well, so people said, and he lived up to their opinion. The two had much in common, and became fast friends. They played stupid pranks on old folk, scaring them by pounding on their doors after dark, and perhaps driving their beasts afield. It was all very childish and irrational; both Dysmas and Gestas were agreed on that. Besides, these things

lost their novelty after a time, and in any case, they brought no material gain. One evening, however, just as night closed in, they were surprised to see a man, a few years their senior, walking stealthily towards them. It was Barabbas. People suspected him of more than one raid on their property, and he was venturesome in coming to the village. But evidently he had something to impart. The finger laid on his lips enjoined silence, and following an inclination of his head, they passed out to an adjoining hillock. There Barabbas showed them a handful of gold coins, which he took from the folds of his robe. He filled their eager ears with tales that thrilled them with his daring, and the chink of the money moved them with cupidity. If they would quit the monotonous and servile life they were living, and join forces with him, they too might have everything heart could wish. The prospect was alluring, and the next day they were gone.

The months which followed were filled with sheep-stealing and cattle-lifting, with sundry thefts, relieved now and then by a spice of danger. Christ's allusions to the risks run by the shepherds when thieves came "to steal, and to kill, and to destroy," and His story of the traveller plundered and left to die by the wayside, were not imaginary. They throw a lurid light on conditions which obtained in those days. And such was the kind of life to which these men gave themselves under the intrepid leadership of Barabbas. One foul deed followed another. Discretion was thrown to the winds. A determined assault on the forces of the law took place. And then, after what had almost made them believe they led charmed lives, Fortune deserted them. They

were trapped in their desert stronghold, and swift trial and sentence followed. Now they hung there to die, with Jesus in the midst.

Like each other in their mode of life, they were also one in this: they turned on their fellow sufferer with bitter reproach and revilings. Their resentment against Barabbas was vented on Jesus. They derided Him. They taunted Him. Hardened in sin, and made still harder by the inhumanity of the mob, they rivalled each other in the gibes directed at the Galilæan. They heard what the Scribes and Pharisees were saying to Him, and the inscription they had read before they were crucified now became intelligible. "Thou that destroyest the Temple and buildest it in three days, save Thyself. If Thou be the Son of God come down from the Cross." These hateful ecclesiastics vie with the crowd in cruelty. "He saved others; let Him save Himself if He be the Christ." And the soldiers add their word, "If Thou be the king of the Jews, save Thyself."

The mocking words reached the ear of Gestas. Death was still afar, and life was sweet. Could this Man save Himself? Then let Him show the pity which the mob denied and the law forbade. He snatched at the hope like a drowning man at a straw. Here was a means of escape, a way too by which the reckoning with Barabbas might be settled. And Gestas cried, "If Thou be the Christ, save Thyself *and us.*" The malefactor could not see the face of his accomplice, but he waited to hear him repeat the request. But Dysmas was silent. He had heard all that had been said; but he had also heard that prayer of Jesus which sought forgiveness for His enemies. And the malefactor's mind

had reverted to the past. For many a long year, he had not heard the voice of prayer until that hour, and Christ's words of forgiveness had touched him to the quick. The last one whom he had heard speaking to the Deity was his mother. It was just before he finally took to a vicious life. He had come home late, and was astonished to hear his own name. He listened at the lattice. His mother was praying for her headstrong son as one almost beyond human aid. Shame had lashed him mercilessly, but instead of relenting, he had turned away in wrath, and had never been back to the home of his childhood.

> "Heaven is most just, and of our pleasant vices,
> Makes instruments to scourge us."

Now he could recall some of the things she had taught him about the Christ who was to redeem Israel. And the same blessed name had been applied to this Man, who, in the greatness of His heart, could pray for His murderers. Who was He? The jailor had said He was supposed to be a king; some of His tormentors had used the Messianic name. Suppose this were the Messiah? At least, He was superior to the mockery of the rulers, and His majestic calm gave hint of an unearthly greatness. This poor malefactor was strangely subdued. He is a standing illustration of the truth which Paul enunciated: "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin." And like seed sown on inundated land, yielding little promise of harvest,

like that also of which Jesus spoke, the good seed of a mother's teaching and prayers began to bear fruit after many days.

The other was still muttering his reproaches at Christ's passivity when Dysmas spoke. "Dost thou not fear God seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds. But this Man hath done nothing amiss." That reveals what was passing in his mind. They were condemned rightly, and his moral sense endorsed the verdict; but Jesus was innocent. They had made the air hideous with their invective; He had remained silent under all that provocation. They had cursed the hands which tortured them; He had prayed for His persecutors. Although it had come late, yet at last, vision is granted to this contrite heart.

Another penitent's story is found in one of Ralph Connor's works. Bruce, the son of a Scots minister, had spent his life in indifference and sin amid the wilds of Alberta. He is fatally shot in a drunken revel, and he is visited by the "Pilot." He looks into the face of this man for whom he had had no use, and says, "I'd like to live a little longer. I've made such a mess of it! There's my mother, you know, and Jim." Jim was his younger brother, and sworn chum. "Yes, I know, Bruce, but it won't be very long for them, too, and it's a good place." The dying man turned his eyes gratefully on the other, and said with difficulty, "Yes, I believe it all—always did—talked rot—you'll forgive me that!"

The malefactor's remorse was just as deep, his repentance as sincere. Addressing Jesus in plaintive

tones, he exclaims, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest in Thy kingdom." And what a world of meaning was in that word, "Remember"! He had long tried to banish it from his vocabulary. He had driven Memory from the portals of his heart, for she brought nothing but regrets as she conjured up scenes of childhood and innocence. What he desired more than anything else was oblivion. Moreover, to remember was the function of the law; it never forgot. It treasured up each item in its long account against the wrong-doer, waiting until the chances of life should carry him within reach of its inexorable vengeance. And this man realized,

> "Which way I fly is hell;
> Myself am hell."

His horrible past might demand forgetfulness, but his soul craved to be remembered by One so gracious and forgiving. That is proof of his repentance. And his reference to the kingdom suggests the awakening of faith. One so regal must be a King, and a King presupposed a kingdom; though the title above His head, the crowd about His feet indicated a kingdom not of this world. Thus reasoned this seeking soul. Had the Divine Spirit given him again the light he once spurned? Dr. Parker evidently thought so. "The penitent thief saw the kingdom beyond the cross. Great man, piercing mind, audacious thinker! It is a revelation of the Holy Ghost. God opens strange mouths to speak His truth. Did not that dying thief say more in that interview with Christ than some of us have ever said in our lives? He defended Him, he hailed Him Lord, he ascribed

to Him a kingdom, he triumphed over death, he saw the crown above the cross."

Though it meant unutterable anguish for Christ to turn His head, those luminous eyes are bent on the face of the penitent. "Verily, I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." That term was a familiar one. The word, Paradise, sprang originally from the Persian, and denoted a pleasure-garden. Later, it came to be applied to the state of the blessed. The Eden which was lost through disobedience was to be surpassed by a glorious garden, where the souls of the righteous were to enjoy felicity. Josephus tells us that the Essenes viewed it as "situated beyond the ocean, where there was no uncongenial rain or cold or heat, and where righteous souls were perpetually refreshed by gentle zephyrs blowing from the sea." Yet others again regarded it as an intermediate state where the good awaited the final judgment. But that is beside the point. It is enough to say that Christ held out the promise to this dying man of life for evermore. And while it is admittedly unsound to rear a doctrine on a single text, yet these words are of the deepest import. Christ meant precisely what He said. Whatever the thief's views of Paradise, crude and ill-defined though they may have been, Christ held out the assurance that his life was to be reclaimed. His defiled soul was to be made fit for Divine fellowship. Thrust out from the society of men, he was yet to be made worthy of Christ's companionship. They were to be as truly side by side in the eternal realm as they were then, upon those rude instruments of death.

The pagan poet, with sensuous touch, says:

"Here with a loaf of bread beneath the bough,
A flask of wine, a book of verse—and thou
Beside me singing in the wilderness—
And wilderness is paradise enow."

But that materialistic philosophy leads to scepticism, for he goes on to say:

"One moment in annihilation's waste,
One moment of the well of life to taste—
The stars are setting, and the caravan
Starts for the Dawn of Nothing—Oh, make haste."

Though we reject the views here advanced by Omar Khayyám, yet it must be conceded that he makes this fact plain: it is in a given companionship that Paradise can be found. Paul expressed himself as filled with a desire "to be with Christ." And the promise of the Saviour's company cheered the soul of the dying thief. He was to be with Christ! Nor was that priceless privilege to come only after long and dreamless slumber. "To-day" —*sēmeron,* as Dr. A. B. Bruce points out, means *to-day.* "To-day as opposed to a boon expected at some future time."

Death is the terror of kings; it is no longer the king of terrors for the Christian. What Bunyan saw as a river, which must be crossed before the pilgrim could enter the Celestial City, is only a stream flowing from the Gardens of God. What Whittier describes as "A covered way which opens into light," is but a momentary darkness leading into the glorious radiance of Paradise. If words have any meaning at all, if Christ can be trusted implicitly, we are convinced of this: Not only does

personality persist beyond the grave, but also the new life begun in Christ on earth goes on without intermission. Some of our hymns have wrought untold harm. They have disseminated crude and erroneous views. The soul of this malefactor was assured that through Christ death would be only a transition. The body has completed its functions. It is a scaffolding required by the builder of character, no longer required when life is done. It is an outworn garment, used by the real self, but then discarded. It may be wrapped with fragrant spices to preserve it from decay; it may be cast to the four winds as dust. But the soul of the Christian believer is with Christ. The dragon-fly passes through various stages before it comes to its life of beauty and power of flight. It first lives in a pond—an unlovely thing born in the muddy waters. Then it reaches the grub-stage. Finally, it comes forth a creature of shimmering blue and green, with its gauzy wings aflame with light.

The New Testament describes death in four figurative ways. Jesus used the idea of sleep in connection with Lazarus, and also the dead child of Jairus. "She is not dead, but sleepeth." Yet it has often been overlooked that sleep is only a transient thing. It is compassed by a few hours at most, and it certainly implies waking to renewed activity. Then there is Paul's phrase, "The time of my departure is at hand." That means in the original, the casting off of a ship's moorings, and the moving out to the open sea. Another is descriptive of Bedouin life: "We know that if the earthly house of our tabernacle be taken down, we have a building of God." When the tent is struck, the soul

treks onwards to the city which hath foundations. And so the picture of the traveller, at last coming to his destination in safety and peace. The fourth occurs in connection with our Lord's transfiguration, when Jesus talked with Moses and Elijah concerning "His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem." Now, decease connotes to our minds the end of all things, but in this passage, it means the beginning of things! It is "His exodus," a word which, associated as it is here with Moses, is eloquent of that pilgrimage from a life of limitation to that fair land of promise which the race has long desired.

The malefactor might not comprehend all that Christ's word implied. Yet there is no valid reason why we should not. What he did find, however, was that which banished dread and gloom from his soul, and flooded his being with light and peace. A writer on South America describes the initiation ceremony of a secret fraternity flourishing there. The candidate is first taken along what is called the Path of Death. He passes through dim catacombs excavated beneath the temple of mysteries, and there both courage and faith are subjected to rigorous tests. Phantoms dash out of the darkness. Knives flash perilously near to his face. The air is filled with wailings and terrifying shrieks. At last, however, the ordeal draws to an end. The candidate arrives at a fissure in the rock. He sees the glad light of day, and is greeted with the cheers of those who have combined to make his initiation so trying. Then he is duly installed as one worthy to be received into the fraternity.

Even were death as terrifying—and it is not for

the believer—there is the abundant entrance into the everlasting Kingdom, and the gladness of the new life commences not in the distant future, but in the very hour when the heart is thrown open to the incoming of Christ. That dissolute character, Saul Kane, whom John Masefield limns in *The Everlasting Mercy,* is not unlike this thief on the cross. He has run the whole gamut of wickedness: poacher, drunkard, libertine. And after a night's carousing, he wakes from his stupor to look at the huddled forms of his companions. The room is heavy with reeking stench, and his soul is nauseated. He goes forth into the rain-washed air of morning. Something awakens within his breast. The soaring lark chants its song of praise in the blue, cloud-flecked sky. The smoke is curling up from homes where love dwells. Then Saul Kane finds that for which his heart has unconsciously been yearning: repentance, and the joyous experience of God's pardon. The shutters of his being are thrown back; sunlight enters his soul. Everything around speaks of the Redeemer's patience and love. And how do the tumultuous emotions of his heart find expression?

> "O glory of the lighted mind!
> How dead I'd been, how dumb, how blind.
> The station brook, to my new eyes,
> Was babbling out of Paradise;
> The waters rushing from the rain,
> Were singing Christ has risen again.
> I thought all earthly creatures knelt
> From rapture of the joy I felt."

Such must have been the feelings of him also to whom Christ brought such hope. Yet we ask

whether such a man could be happy in Paradise, unless grace works an immediate change. Can character, which requires a lifetime to shape into the smallest resemblance to Christ, be transmitted in a moment, as in this case? That is a point on which none may dogmatize. But this is certain: God's forgiveness brings the capacity for holiness. The Prodigal, to whom his forfeited sonship was restored, might feel his unworthiness. Yet there was no doubt about the love which had restored him, for it gleamed in his father's face. And so it would be with this pardoned soul on the cross. Life had been wasted, but God's gracious work had begun in his heart. Whether grace operates swiftly or slowly is not our concern so long as the blessing be sure. And the goal of redeemed humanity is that it should be conformed to the image of God's Son. There is a legend which is suggestive, if nothing more. It says that this poor thief came to the gates of Paradise, and found an angel guarding them. He saw the vast spreading Gardens of God beyond them, but he did not dare to seek admittance. The angel bade him draw near, but with downcast head, he replied, "Nay, I fear that I am unfit to enter here, for I have been a grievous sinner." "Then how camest thou hither?" he was asked. "Because the Saviour Christ promised that I should come to be with Him." The gate was flung open at that word, and Christ Himself approached. He welcomed the forgiven man, and leading him to a part of the garden where the soil had been freshly turned, said, "Look, friend!" The man did so wonderingly, and Jesus went on, "No fruits of the Spirit grow here. It has been uncared for. Yet thy Father's forgiving

love hath uprooted the weeds, and already the soil is prepared for the planting. Now let the work begin, that love, joy, peace, and all the fragrant fruits of grace may abound." The man looked into the face of Christ, his eyes brimming with gratitude. "Lord, if only I had begun this work below."

We can leave all unanswered questions to the boundless mercy of God, but this truth greets us with gladdening light. No soul is beyond His aid if there be but repentance. No matter how wasted the life, how misused the gifts, how defiled the raiment, His grace is all-availing. Many of us have felt the weight of our sins. And the heart has cried:

> "Could my zeal no respite know,
> Could my tears for ever flow,
> All for sin could not atone;
> Thou must save, and Thou alone."

Yet, that cannot justify the soul in abusing God's tender mercies and forbearance. "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid!" One of the two malefactors was saved at the eleventh hour, but only one of the two. The other, hard and impenitent to the last, closed his heart to the influences of Christ. It was due to his long acquiescence in evil. The power to repent had been cut off, like an atrophied limb, not by Divine fiat, but by his own choice repeatedly exercised. In the Mammoth Caves of Kentucky are fish which have still the place for eyes, but the eyes themselves have been withdrawn. The explanation is that their progenitors once lived in sunlit waters, but that for centuries the stream which these fish inhabit has

been flowing underground, and Nature has taken away a faculty which is no longer required. A magnet allowed to lie unused, without the armature attached, will rapidly degenerate into an ordinary piece of steel. It was so with Gestas. He had doubtless had some opportunities. There had been stirrings in his soul. The voice of conscience was clamant now and then. Yet he steeled his heart against these things, and even the nearness of Christ failed to awaken the dead self. We dare not trifle with grace. In the light of His love, we must reckon ourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto Him. Thus shall we at last find entrance into the Paradise of God, saved by faith in Him.

"Carry me over the long, last mile,
Man of Nazareth, Christ for me.
Weary I wait at Death's dark stile,
In the wild and the waste where the wind blows free,
And the shadows and sorrows come out of my past,
Look keen through my heart,
And will not depart,
Now that my poor world has come to its last.

"Lord, is it long that my spirit must wait,
Man of Nazareth, Christ for me?
Deep is the stream, and the night is late,
And grief blinds my soul that I cannot see.
Speak to me out of the silences, Lord,
That my spirit may know,
As I forward go,
That Thy pierced hands are lifting me over the ford."

XIII

THE CROWD ABOUT THE CROSS

"They watched Him there."
—MATT. 27:36.

THE three victims were enclosed by a ring of steel, and the excitement of the people was at the highest pitch. Those in front were pressed forward by the weight behind; in turn they were repelled by the rude strength of the guard which held the ground. The shouts and outcries were deafening. Ribald laughter blended with the bitter complaints of those who could not see what was going on. The actual work of the crucifixion was carried out with revolting expeditiousness; yet these men were only obeying orders. They were not in a position to weigh the justice or otherwise of the sentence; it did not concern them. All they had to do was to follow their instructions. Then the main guard returned to the city, leaving a quaternion in charge under the centurion. "And sitting down they watched Him there."

If, as Alexander Pope says, "The proper study of mankind is man," this crowd offers abundant scope. The great concourse has many different types, and although the heart sickens at the sight of such callousness and debased humanity, yet we would fain understand the people there, in order that we may

the better know our own hearts. The soldiers themselves were frankly bored by the whole proceeding, except as it affected them personally. One of War's most terrible effects on the individual is the indifference it engenders towards all suffering. Even this outrage left them unmoved. They are not to be blamed unduly; that goes without saying. They were victims of circumstance. Yet while we admit freely that they were not responsible for putting this innocent Man to death, our repugnance is scarcely diminished by that fact. They were sufficiently experienced to know what perquisites were due to them as executioners; the clothing of the victims belonged to the guard. And even as we look, we hear them haggling about the garments and sandals of the three men. The Fates had been unfair; the difficulty of dividing the spoil can be seen. Three sets of garments and three pairs of sandals present a problem in equitable distribution when there are four rapacious men to be satisfied. The clothes were not the main ground of contention, however; there were means of balancing matters, even if some of the garments had to be torn up to do it. But the seamless vesture belonging to Jesus, and somewhat unusual because peculiar to men of the north, was the obstacle. To tear that was to ruin it. An idea presented itself to one of the men. They had nothing to do for some time, so they would gamble for it. That vesture would provide a stake for their game. The suggestion was hailed with delight, and they began to throw their dice. Matthew quotes the prophetic word of the Psalmist, "They parted My garments among them, and upon My vesture did they cast lots."

That done, there was nothing more to occupy their minds except to laugh at the exasperated section of the crowd, or to intervene when some of the jesters carried their humour too far. But they were unable to extract much satisfaction out of that. There were some feeble attempts to play with the dice again, but beyond the few denarii they could muster among them, there did not seem anything worth the effort, and with stifled yawns, they lay back and watched. The wonderful calmness of Jesus surprised them as their attention was focussed on Him. They began to wonder why Pilate had let the Jews dictate to him as they had done. But after all, as one said when his opinion was asked, it had nothing to do with them whether Jesus were the King of the Jews or not. They were under orders, and the sooner the end came, the sooner would they be relieved of their tedious duties.

The quaternion formed, as it were, an inner circle round the cross. But there were others. While we have tried to make due allowance for the soldiery, nothing can be said in mitigation of the rulers' heartlessness. The Scribes and Pharisees, professedly righteous and the supposed guardians of virtue, stood watching His sufferings. Their faces, flushed with success, were yet dark with hatred. This obnoxious Reformer had avoided their traps before. Indeed, skilfully laid though they had been, He had seemed uncannily aware of them, and had passed on His way unscathed. His unblemished life and known nobility of character presented an almost unassailable position, and none felt the puerility of the charges laid against Him more than those who framed them. Still, He had ventured once too

often. He had come to Jerusalem as though daring them to do their worst. As they viewed things, He had added insult to injury. Not only had He permitted the multitude to create an unseemly stir acclaiming Him the Messiah, but He had also turned out those traders who held the priestly permit. He had done incalculable mischief.

Yet—"All things come to him who waits!" There were more ways of taking a citadel than simply storming it. If a frontal attack failed, might not the defences be penetrated by subterfuge? The Scribes were accomplished in that art. Jesus had not reckoned on one of His own disciples turning traitor. He had possibly persuaded Himself that because they had been swayed by His promises, and had followed Him unquestioningly up and down the country, that they were loyal to the core, and would stoutly defend Him to the death! Yet the glint of a handful of silver had done it! So now they baited Him. "Let the Christ, the king of Israel, descend now from the cross." The term was not of their choosing. It maddened them to see that inscription, naming this fellow the "King of the Jews," and they had not only remonstrated, but had done their utmost to get the Governor to change it. He was stubborn. And they were sufficiently shrewd to know that, were they to press the point, pliant though he had been, Pilate might reverse his judgment, and refuse to hand their enemy over to them. So forced by circumstances, they allowed the title to stand. But they were subtle. If the wording could not be changed, its meaning might. They would fill it with ridicule, and thus destroy any effect it might have on the minds of the unthinking.

Their efforts were stoutly supported by the Sadducees. Caiaphas was their leading representative, and it is tolerably certain that, notwithstanding his exalted office, he would be there to exult in the downfall of his arch-critic. The Sadducees were the materialists of that time. They denied any future life. That explains their anxiety to secure the death of this Man. Crucify Him, and He would be silenced for ever. With Jesus put out of the way of doing any further harm, their prestige might be restored. The only one who had ever dared to shame their hypocrisy, and question their right to do as they thought best, had overstepped Himself; He had not measured the power they held in their hands! It had been difficult to persuade the Sanhedrin that extreme measures were warranted. The Pharisees were trammelled by their beliefs which did not exclude the possibility of dead prophets re-appearing. Their argument had been that the most sensible course would be to arrest Him secretly, and keep Him without public trial in some dungeon. His disappearance might cause some comment for a time, but He would speedily be forgotten, and the harm He had wrought would terminate naturally. But the others prevailed. It was the only way to give them a spectacular triumph over their antagonist. And now, the butt of their jests, Jesus was lifted up to the ungrateful contumely of the crowd.

"Blow, blow, thou winter wind,
Thou art not so unkind
As man's ingratitude.
Thy tooth is not so keen,
Because thou art not seen,
Although thy breath be rude."

Those words are filled with deeper meaning as we look at the farther circle, swirling about the cross. It comprised the ordinary people, who had been brought together by the promise of a spectacle such as they had never seen before. Not that an execution were so novel. It was the character of the Man, and the dramatic way in which He had been compelled to take the place of an infamous scoundrel like Barabbas. Jesus was well-known. Even those who had scarcely paused in their buying and selling were interested in Him. The commotion He had made when He entered Jerusalem, precisely as Zechariah had foretold the Messianic Prince would come, was unforgettable. They had shouted with the rest. It was so remarkable, and promised so much. To be freed from the yoke of Rome, to have no more taxes to pay, seemed "A consummation devoutly to be wished." But the popular outburst had been swiftly negatived by scurrilous reports about Him. He was an impostor! He had dared to lift His presumptuous hand against the Lord's anointed. The scene when He had cleansed the Temple courts was exaggerated into the preliminary of an attack upon the High Priest himself. Had it not been for the vigilance of the guards in Caiaphas's house, this Jesus would have hesitated about nothing! And so the superstitious feelings of the people were played on, and their prejudices wakened. They were inoculated with the virus of ecclesiastical jealousy, and so they now joined in echoing the taunts of their rulers, and seeking to make the hour more bitter to be endured. There were others whose delight in Christ's suffering was merely indulging a savage instinct. To torture the weak or helpless is one of the primi-

tive passions not wholly extinct to this hour. These men viewed what was going on from another angle. The Victim having been provided by the ruling class, it was required that they should endorse the action of their leaders, especially as it was speciously advanced as having been done in the interests of the entire community. Little did they know that, when they bade Jesus come down from the cross, they were lacerating the tenderest heart that ever beat. Little did they realize that love had deliberately chosen the cross as the highest expression of God's regard for His children, and yet His unalterable condemnation of sin. But some who smile approvingly, whose heads wag as they gloat over the retribution that has befallen this Man, have other motives for their presence. They are the merchants who felt the heat of His burning reproaches, and the sharp lash of His indignation. He had tried to take the bread out of their mouths! Yea, He had been very haughty and masterful that day, but He cut a sorry figure now, with His crown of thorns and the title over His head! And others who had wilted perceptibly as Jesus had denounced men who oppressed the hireling, who defrauded the widow, who lied and cheated in their trade, rubbed their hands together gleefully. After all, there was some justice in the world. Jesus had made them miserable by His words; even more by His quixotic mode of life. Why should not a man conduct his business as he liked? Why should he balk at a little shrewdness now and then, even though it were contrary to the Mosaic tradition? If he made a substantial contribution to the Temple, absolution could be obtained. Jesus had always been inconsiderate and unpractical

when it came to the actual affairs of life! There were His peculiar views about one's duty to one's neighbour, His demand for mercy and not sacrifice, His insistence upon the pure heart and honest motive. And all these things were offensive to those who were content to have religion without an inconvenient conscience.

As in every multitude, there were some people who had just gone with the crowd. Notwithstanding any better feelings, they were swayed by the passions of the moment, and assented to the opinion of the majority rather than appear singular. It has been well said that "One of the pests that dog civilization, the more so the further it advances, is the fear of ridicule. . . . Is there anybody living who has not been laughed out of what he ought to have done, and laughed into what he ought not to have done? Who has not stifled his best feelings? Who has not mortified his noblest desires solely to escape being laughed at? And then, too, after having been laughed down ourselves, we join the pack who go about laughing down others." There is nothing easier; there is nothing more reprehensible. That type of man is here, and alas! woman as well. They certainly do not call out with the enthusiasm of the rest. They can find something to pity in the agony of this Man; He bears Himself with such fortitude. Although they have not the moral courage to side with Him, or even to dissociate themselves from what the rest do, they question the justice of this act to which they are party. We need not ask why; some of them have been the recipients of His bounty. That gaunt man, standing silent and stolid near a noisy group, plainly bears on his face the marks of

long days of pain; he was brought back from the Valley of the Shadow by the gracious Galilæan. That other, walking with some difficulty as he changes his position from one side of the crowd to the other, lay for years seeking alms from the passer-by. But Jesus gave him back to an honourable and useful life, although he has not yet become quite accustomed to his new power of moving his limbs. He cannot wholly forget what he owes. There are some women whose children Jesus blessed, and though they cannot understand why, if He were so gracious and good, He thus is dying like a common malefactor, they make no protest. But it is all so mystifying. Many others feel the same thing. They had listened to Christ's teaching; it touched their souls. They had seen strange miracles wrought; blessings innumerable had been imparted to the neediest. And yet—yet—they could form no opinion of Him. The leaders were educated men. They were the final authority on questions dealing with the Messiah, and they had condemned Jesus in no uncertain way. It was reported that they had deliberately taken Him before the Governor, after the case had been fairly heard in their own court, and the official sanction had been given to rid the city of a deceiver. How then could the ordinary mind set itself up against the combined wisdom of the Sanhedrin and the State? Why should the Man-in-the-street concern himself with what was beyond him? "If He were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered Him up to thee," the priests had said to Pilate; and the crowd echoed their considered judgment.

It must be acknowledged that, from their stand-

point, it was perplexing. There was so much to be said on both sides—and it had been said! It seemed incredible that one who was wicked could have done the kindly deeds and spoken the gracious words of counsel and comfort Jesus had. On the other hand, it seemed absurd that One who was good could be condemned by the High Priest, who was the representative of Jehovah Himself, and whose colleagues openly showed their approval of this Man's death. The common mind was baffled. But that was neither the time nor place to debate the question, for that moment gave promise of a new touch of interest to a spectacle which was becoming nauseating. Their attention was drawn to one of the two thieves. They had both reviled Him for some time, but now the man on the right had completely changed his attitude towards Jesus. He was imploring His forgiveness, and seeking a place in His kingdom. While some laughed uproariously at the humour of it, others were not so sure. They saw the pallor of death overspreading the bandit's face, and noting the infinite compassion in the Master's gaze, they felt the import of His reply. What is more, they discerned a new glory flood Christ's face, as though this man's penitence had given Him joy unspeakable. The soft radiance of conquering love overspread the sacred brow, touching the crown of thorns with light, and lifting this Man into a position which dominated the soul which was willing to see things as they were. Many a heart thrilled at the sight of such patient dealing with one so bitter of speech and black of life. Yet how pathetic that none had the grace to rebuke those about him, and to gladden the Saviour's heart even with tardy cour-

age! Pathetic? It is tragic. They must have made their judgment blind. There was more than enough evidence for them—there is more ample proof today—to reach an accurate estimate of His character and worth. Browning points out:

> "The acknowledgment of God in Christ
> Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee
> All questions in the earth, and out of it."

As we turn from the seething mass of men and women, sated with the spectacle of suffering, we see a few figures in the distance which seem familiar. They are taking the utmost pains not to be conspicuous, but we know them to be disciples. Self-preservation is Nature's first law. They had no wish to repeat the experience of the past night, for they might yet share their Master's fate. But some hidden impelling made them draw as near as they dared, for they were conscious of disloyalty that gave them no peace. Why had they not done something for Him? The question kept re-asserting itself, and no reference to Nature's laws seemed to have any force when the law of love had been disregarded. What seemed worse was the memory of all their bickerings and self-seeking. Why had they grieved Him so often by their pettiness and smallness of mind? God might forgive them; they could never forgive themselves. The bitterest drop in any cup ever held to human lips is to recall chances of showing our love, and yet to know that it is too late. Small services which might have brightened another's life have been withheld. Kind words which would have meant so much have not been spoken.

Then pitiless death slams the door in our faces, and we are shut out in the darkness, with only remorse for a companion.

Perhaps that is why some of them had drawn near to Calvary, in spite of the danger.

> "Is it not strange, the darkest hour
> That ever dawned on sinful earth,
> Should touch the heart with softer power
> For comfort, than an angel's mirth?
> That to the cross, the mourner's eye should turn
> Sooner than where the stars of Christmas burn?"

One of these men is Peter. Having seen him so recently by the fire in the courtyard, we easily recognize him, although he keeps his face screened as much as possible by his flowing headdress. The close-set lips and contracted brows show that he is labouring under great emotion. In fact, were it possible to see a man enduring the supposed agonies of Purgatory, as depicted by Dante, we could imagine this to be he. Another is younger, and slight of form. He would have passed us unnoticed only we see him approaching a knot of women, one of whom is on the verge of collapse. The rest give way as he draws near. He places his arms about her, and while at first we thought he intended leading her away from the scene, he surprises us by taking her forward to the foot of the cross.

The hours drag on. With their passing, the spectacle has lost its attraction for the multitude, and it is slowly beginning to melt away. The air has become sultry. Distinct rumblings of thunder can be heard, and the weird gloom settling over the landscape prompts some of the more cautious to retreat

citywards before the impending storm breaks. But we still linger, feeling the truth of Whittier's words:

> "The solemn shadow of Thy cross
> Is better than the sun."

In that subdued light, we see what otherwise might have remained hidden. Love can triumph even in the face of death itself. Sin did its worst, but Love gave its best. What those deluded people had missed! Their judgment was superficial. The ship most to be admired is not necessarily the one which has just left the builders' hands, bright in the glory of her new life. She may be entrancing with her gleaming decks, her shining brass-work, her fresh paint. Yet that vessel which has just reached port, whose hull is scarred and chafed by the ice through which she has forged her way, whose decks have been pounded by the wrathful waves, whose sails have been blackened and split by the hurricane, but who still has safely entered the haven with her house-flag flying proudly at the masthead, and her ensign at the stern, may possess a beauty which the untried can never boast. It is the tempest of life which tests character, and reveals eternal grandeur of soul. And Christ is incomparably the greatest of those who have sailed time's troubled seas, enduring as seeing Him who is invisible. This was no mere deceiver of the people, nor even the object of priestly enmity. He is the Desire of all nations, and the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. Sin laid the cross on Him, but Love led Him to the cross. And the Divine affection which breathed such words of unfathomable comfort to

the dying penitent, which also sought John out and entrusted him with a mission whereby his own love might be expressed in daily deed, seeks our unwearying service. Thus shall we prove the truth of Frederick Denison Maurice's words, "The constraining love of Christ is the mightiest power in the universe."

XIV

THE OFFICER IN COMMAND

"When the centurion which stood over against Him saw that He so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this Man was the Son of God."

—MARK 15:39.

THE centurion paced restlessly to and fro within the narrow limits kept by his men. He had been on duty since early morning, for his command had been detailed to carry out the execution. It was distasteful at best, and unbefitting the uniform he wore. Not that he had any objection to aid in ridding the world of its criminals; he had done that before, and would probably do it again. But there was something about this that filled his soul with loathing and revolt. As his company took charge of the Prisoner that morning, and marched beside Him in the way leading to Golgotha, he had seen that his task would not be easy. The Prisoner would not give any trouble; He was far-spent already. The way in which He sank under the cross's weight showed that. Nor would there be any organized attempt at freeing Him. On the contrary, the officer could not see a single friendly face in the whole of that jostling mob. But that was where he saw trouble brewing. It was disgusting! He who had followed the standards of Cæsar many a league,

who had fought resolutely against valiant foes, now rebelled against the form that duty took.

Once the crosses were erected, there was nothing to do but wait, be the time long or short, until death should finish the work they had begun. But did that comprise all that duty demanded? Would that it did! He must perforce look on at the curious sightseers, and listen to the barbed jests of a mob making sport of crucified men. And what was still harder for such a heart to endure, he must maintain discipline over himself as well as his men. That in itself was no easy thing. "The difficult part of good temper," says Emerson, "consists in forbearance and accommodation to the ill humour of others." The centurion discovered that. This was not war! It was not for this kind of thing he had entered the imperial army, and taken his commission. He could have argued:

> "If it be aught towards the general good,
> Set honour in one eye and death i' the other,
> And I will look on both indifferently,
> For let the gods so speed me as I love honour
> More than I fear death."

What contribution to the common good lay in his service that day? Jesus was not a man of violence who had terrorized the community, the mention of whose name made faces blanch with fear. He might be a deceiver or be only self-deceived, but He was certainly unlike the other two, or even Barabbas. Still, the officer could not help himself; duty must be done.

That did not preclude him from following his train of thought. The qualities which made him a soldier

enabled him to appreciate a Man like this. Stoic though the Roman was, he could not but admire the demeanour of Jesus as the mob moved about the cross. In similar circumstances, he had known victims maddened by the insolent mockery of those who came to see them die. He remembered some who, after hazardous lives and having shed blood without compunction, whined in craven fear as death stared them in the face. But Jesus was vastly different. Although the rabble took delight in His sufferings, and spat upwards at that pain-racked face, He had not winced. How did He comport Himself? As one worthy of the title nailed over His head. Whether He were a king or not, a kinglier man this soldier had never seen. The courage which refused the medicated wine at the outset characterized Him throughout. The officer knew what that meant. Some pious women of Jerusalem always rendered this service to malefactors who were doomed to the cross. They provided a portion of wine compounded with myrrh, which dulled the sensitive nerves, and so made the agony of crucifixion less acute. And Christ's refusal showed a valiant spirit. The centurion could not know that Jesus had once asked, "The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?" What he did know was that this was the act of a brave man. And that was only one thing. The self-mastery which Jesus manifested in face of such infuriating insolence would not be lost on him. Christ had not been silent altogether. He had prayed for mercy on those who were guilty of His death. He spoke comfort to one of His fellow-sufferers. He had sought a home for

His mother with one of His former associates. And yet never a word of rebuke for the people who mocked Him, nor even for the priests who urged them on. The priests! That was what angered this soldier's soul.

He was only a man of war himself, and had done many violent things in his time. He did not make much profession of religion, although he held his gods in veneration—was not the giving or withholding of victory with them? Yet he felt piety perhaps ill became one who lived by the sword and might perish by it. That did not blind him to the value of virtue. On the contrary, he knew that religion ought to make a higher demand on a man than even duty could. And base indeed were those who were disloyal to the light while professing to hold up the torch of truth. They were repellent to his sense of the fitness of things, and those martial qualities to which we alluded made him wrathful towards men like these unworthy ecclesiastics. He could forgive the ignorant; they did not realize their cruelty, nor, lacking sensibility for the finer things, could they measure the pain their words gave. But these men of light and leading!—Well was it for them that he felt the restraints of discipline, or his sword might have leapt from its gleaming scabbard, and glutted itself in their base blood. "It is no great matter to associate with the good and gentle," says Thomas à Kempis, "for this is naturally pleasing to all, and every one willingly enjoyeth peace, and loveth those best that agree with him. But to be able to live peaceably with hard, or perverse, or undisciplined persons, is a great grace and an exceedingly

commendable and manly deed." If the latter describes the mind of this centurion, then he was undoubtedly a man of fine calibre.

"Not yet three hours!" The day seemed interminable. He was weary of the whole thing, and even the crowd seemed to have lost much of its zest. The officer paused in his walk. His eyes turned questioningly to the sky. It was barely noon, but a strange darkness was descending on the earth. The thought passed through his mind that the sun, disgusted even as he was by such insensate hate, was hiding his face from it, or else that Nature were robing herself in the garments of grief. But though the fancy swiftly fled, the gloom remained. It became more intense, until it was difficult to distinguish anything clearly; and yet it was more than a dimming of midday light—it seemed something mental as well as physical. It was as though the heart were wrapped about with swirling vapours; as if the chill of a tomb struck to the innermost recesses of being. The three crosses stood silhouetted against a forbidding sky. What could be the explanation?

The centurion did not know; we do not know. One thing is certain. This veiling of the sun could not have been an eclipse. The Passover was invariably celebrated at the time of a full moon, when this could not have occurred, and an eclipse lasts about fifteen minutes in all, while this darkness lasted three hours. It might have been due to heavy clouds coming between the earth and the sun, but this again would be extremely unlikely in a Judæan springtide, and just when the sun had reached the zenith. But why speculate when there is always the possibility of the miraculous? Whatever the natural explanation,

this gloom signifies the moral anguish through which the Son of God was passing. Voluntarily He had submitted Himself to the death of the cross, and yet that death was only the consummation of His life of sacrifice in which He identified Himself with mankind. If God had laid on Him the iniquity of us all, if He were as truly the representative of the race as the High Priest was the representative of his nation, then His sin-bearing brought a sense of alienation until the sacrifice was complete, and atonement was made.

It was now three o'clock, and the crowd had thinned perceptibly. Its raucous cries no longer offended the ear. The feelings of the officer seemed to have communicated themselves in some way to his men, and the end could not now be far off. They heard Christ exclaim: "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani—My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" And one of them, pity filling his rough heart, took the sponge-stopper from his wine-flask, and moistening it, raised it to the lips of the dying Saviour. The onlookers protested as their interest re-awakened. "Behold, He calleth for Elijah. Let us see whether Elijah will come to take Him down." The dimming eyes opened again. Jesus temporarily revived, and with vibrant tones declared, "It is finished! Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." The end had come!

"Perhaps thou wilt say the good, at times, begin what they cannot bring to an issue, but I say they always accomplish it," wrote King Alfred. "Though they may not always be able to bring to pass the deed, yet they have the full purpose; and the unwavering purpose is to be accounted an act

performed, for it never fails of its reward here or in the next world." Christ had, however, completed that which He came to do. There was perfection which never crowns our most earnest efforts, and having tasted death for every man, He threw open the gates of life.

Ominously the thunders roared. The earth seemed convulsed with mighty grief. Its frame shook with emotion as its Lord died, and the officer, looking at the scattering people now filled with dread, felt the ground heaving beneath his feet.

> ". . . When these prodigies
> Do so conjointly meet, let not men say
> These are their reasons; they are natural;
> For I believe they are portentous things. . . .
> But men may construe things after their fashion,
> Clean from the purpose of the things themselves."

After all, natural law is only a convenient phrase by which we describe the phenomena of the universe, and it is significant that those who have inspected the rocks in the vicinity of Jerusalem declare that there are fissures which run transversely, and are quite distinct from the natural cleavages. We simply mention that in passing. It is enough to note from the Gospel records that this Roman officer, disciplined to endure events without showing any emotion, was profoundly moved. What memories came back in that moment? Did he know what had happened to a brother officer on a previous occasion? That officer had a servant to whom he was deeply attached. Perhaps the man had saved his master's life on some sanguinary field; at least he had proved his worth and the master was prepared to do any-

thing for him now that he was so grievously ill. Jesus had come to Capernaum where the officer was stationed. Dismissing any prejudice lurking in his mind, or any fear of criticism which might be incurred, he went boldly to Christ and sought His aid. Our Lord responded with alacrity, and promised to go at once to the house. But this was more than the soldier had dared to anticipate. "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof, but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed."

If he were surprised by Christ's magnanimity, the Master was equally delighted with his implicit belief. Turning to the disciples, He exclaimed, "Verily, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." He went on to speak of the time when the alien should find a place in the Kingdom, which the rightful heirs might miss through unbelief. And the servant was cured. Did the officer become a follower of Christ? Was the story carried to Jerusalem, as a choice morsel of gossip among the garrison? It is quite possible. But of this we are sure: what was at first unintelligible to this centurion now became clear. The unremitting hate with which Jesus had been persecuted by the Jews, the mock coronation by the guard, the title over His head, were now explicable. When to the majestic bearing of this Man was added His petition to the Supreme, whom He designated Father, the officer felt he had the key to the mystery.

The darkness was slowly lifting. The sun shot through a jagged rent in the dull mantle of that unnatural sky. And as the centurion looked around, he saw that of the spectators, only a few women re-

mained as though they would keep the tryst of the dead. A soldier came panting up the hill. He brought tidings of a strange occurrence in the Temple. The heavy curtain veiling the sacred place from the common eye, had been torn in twain. Nor was it due to any human agency, he urged; those present declared that it was rent from the cornice downwards, as though by a supernatural hand. That to the centurion must have been baffling; to us it is suggestive of the free access to God made through Christ's sacrifice. The ceremonial law, with its mystic rites and interposed barriers, was abrogated. The Mercy-seat and the Ark of the Covenant, with the broken Tables of the Law, and the pot of Manna, lay within the Holy of Holies. Now they stood revealed. Better still, they were charged with new meaning as these symbols were interpreted in the light of Christ's redemption. Henceforth, the way to the Mercy-seat lay not through the sacrifice offered by human hands, but through the Lamb Himself. The Covenant was superseded by the New Covenant. The broken Tables of the Law might stand for man's disobedience, but there was now the law of Grace, whereby the positive supplanted the negative. And for the Manna, the Bread of Life was available, by which man's soul might be fed and made strong.

The centurion had, of course, neither the capacity nor the training to enable him to discern anything of this. What he did see in this rending of the veil was that vindication of the Sufferer's innocence for which before he had looked in vain. The words leapt from his lips: "Truly, this Man was the Son of God." We cannot determine the meaning of those words; it

is impossible to say just what they connoted to his mind. He could not, it has been affirmed, mean what we do by that phrase, for he was not a believer in the Christian sense. He was the representative of a pagan power, with its deified emperor, and its countless deities. Yet surely such dogmatism regarding what he did not mean is ill-founded. Let us recall what had passed. Whether the centurion was present at Christ's trial or not, he would know what were the charges for which He was condemned to death. They finally resolved themselves into one: "He made Himself the Son of God." That was definite enough. The Galilæan had claimed actual kinship with the God of the Hebrews. He was the supposed Son of Jehovah; that was how the matter stood. Well, there were parallels in mythology. For example, Hercules was the reputed son of Zeus, as was Perseus. Yet there was this vital difference. Granting that the officer were familiar with such stories, he had actually come into personal contact with Jesus. And what were the reiterated cries of the multitude? He recalled them. "If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross." But the challenge was ignored, and the Supreme Himself apparently acquiesced in the fate of the supposed deceiver. The centurion might have felt that, as the heavens failed to vindicate Him, His guilt was beyond question. Yet as He prayed to the Deity, the face of Jesus lit up with Divine light. Imploring pardon for those who had maltreated Him, He did more: He forgave them Himself. What God was asked to do, this Son had already done.

The effect on the Roman mind would be tremendous. The tribute of another distinguished soldier

—Sir Francis Younghusband—is not inapplicable to Jesus Christ. "Freedom, courage, and all the virtues, are necessary and vitally necessary to the one great end of love. In love, the individuality is not lost. Rather is it expressed to its utmost capacity of expression. A man is more himself in the highest moments of love than at any other time, and the very depths of his being then come up." Our Lord had revealed the tenderness of His heart towards those around Him; He showed the triumph of trust as He turned to God. Such confidence was impossible to one who was an impostor, and that endearing name, Father, had given birth to comfort inexpressible. Robert Louis Stevenson relates that when a child, he accidentally locked himself in a dark cupboard. Try as he would, he could not turn the key again, and the place became filled with horrible fears. He cried out in terror. His father heard him, and while the locksmith was sent for, he stood outside the door, talking to the boy reassuringly. Stevenson says his dread went like magic. He even enjoyed the remaining time which elapsed before his prison-door was opened. His father was at hand.

The appeal to the Infinite on the part of Jesus, and the portents marking His passing, were consistent with the claims which had been attributed to Him.

"When beggars die, there are no comets seen;
The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes."

This centurion was a man of intelligence. He had been posted in Jerusalem for some time, and may have been more familiar with the idea of a Messianic King than is usually admitted. But it is suffi-

cient to say that he felt impelled to pay his tribute to One whose qualities of soul he had witnessed with admiration. The cumulative effect of the day was that this was no ordinary man, and the highest encomium that could be framed was not too great for Him. When, therefore, the centurion described Jesus as the Son of God, the expression is noteworthy; it comes from a mind that was unbiassed in Christ's favour, and whatever it connoted, it was meant to be the greatest honour which could be conferred. Nor does the officer of the guard stand alone in his regard.

Since that day, others have turned their eyes to that Divine Sacrifice. They have studied the records of His life; they have sought to understand the intense passion for man's welfare that flamed in His soul. Nor have they all approached Calvary by the paths leading from the Temple of orthodoxy. On the contrary, they have come from different points of the intellectual compass. Just as the paths of Simon of Cyrene, coming in from the country, and the centurion, coming out from the city, converged towards the cross and met in Christ, so have the opinions of others coincided with that expressed in such memorable circumstances. That fact is too important to be dismissed without due consideration. Strauss, though a doughty opponent of accepted views of the Gospels and their authenticity, yet reverently bows the knee before Jesus, "in whom the Divine wisdom first developed itself, as a power determining His whole life and being." While Renan, from his distinctive point of view, affirms that "Whatever may be the unlooked-for phenomena of the future, Jesus will not be surpassed."

The testimony obtained from an entirely different source is strikingly similar, for Lecky, writing as a historian, and with an altogether refreshing candour, pays a tribute to the worth of Christ's work. It is as emphatic as that of the centurion: "If Christianity was remarkable for its appeals to the selfish or interested side of our nature, it was far more remarkable for the empire it attained over disinterested enthusiasm. The Platonist exhorted men to imitate God; the Stoic, to follow reason; the Christian, to love Christ. The later Stoics had often united their notions of excellence in an ideal Sage, and Epictetus had even urged his disciples to set before them some man of surpassing excellence, and to imagine him continually near them; but the utmost the Stoic ideal could become was a model for imitation, and the admiration it inspired could never deepen into affection. It was reserved for Christianity to present to the world an ideal character, which through all the changes of eighteen centuries has inspired the hearts of men with an impassioned love; has shown itself capable of acting on all ages, nations, temperaments, and conditions; has been not only the highest pattern of virtue, but the strongest incentive to its practice; and has exercised so deep an influence that it may be truly said that the simple record of three short years of active life has done more to regenerate and to soften mankind than all the disquisitions of philosophers, and all the exhortations of moralists."

Let it be acknowledged that it is rather the power of the living Christ, and not the simple record of His life, which has made such an impact on the world, and we agree with Lecky's statement of the influence

which Jesus has wielded. But we must make allowance for the view-point, remembering the tolerant words of Ruskin: "Truth reveals itself in proportion to our patience and knowledge, discovers itself kindly to our pleading, and leads us, as it is discovered, into deeper truths." God has His own ways of reaching the soul. He finds men sometimes on trails of their own blazing, and leads them on to knowledge of Himself. Sometimes the truth breaks slowly on the mind after long meditation, as day creeps with measured pace behind the trailing garments of night. It was so in the case of that imposing figure, Sadhu Sundar Singh. He belonged to an exclusive family in India, and had been carefully nurtured in the tenets of his father's faith. They were, however, not wholly satisfactory to him as he found time to reflect. A copy of the New Testament fell into his hands. He scanned its pages cursorily, and then, realizing that it was a forbidden book for one of his caste, he threw it aside. But the words he had read were burned into his mind. He seemed to see them glowing in letters of fire in the blackness of the night. A voice impelled him to read again until he ascertained the truth or falsity of what this book contained. He therefore obtained another copy and, locking himself in his room, began to read. All sense of time passed. He read far into the night. Then with the dawn, light came into his soul. He had, as another before him, "found Him of whom Moses in the Law, and the prophets, did write." When he signified his intention of becoming a Christian, his family was furious. Attempts were made on his life. He was finally cast out as a pariah. Since then, traversing India from one end to the

other, he has spent his life declaring the unsearchable riches of Christ, the Son of God.

Like a flash of lightning the revelation came to Augustine as he heard the Epistle read in Milan Cathedral; to Luther, as he climbed Pilate's Staircase on his knees, in expiation of his sins; to Bunyan as he passed those pious women speaking of the grace abounding. But to the centurion, the way was that of personal contact with Christ Himself. *The Golden Legend* has this strange passage concerning him. His traditional name was Longinus, and the story says: "When he saw the miracles, how the sun lost its light, and great the quaking of the earth when our Lord suffered death and passion in the tree of the cross, then believed he in Jesus Christ. Some say that when he smote our Lord with the spear in the side, the precious blood descended by the shaft of the spear upon his hands, and of adventure, with his hands he touched his eyes, and anon, he that had been to fore blind saw clearly. Wherefore he refused all chivalry, and abode with the Apostles, of whom he was taught and christened; and after, he abandoned to lead an holy life in doing alms and keeping the life of a monk, about eighteen years in Cæsarea and Cappadocia. And by his words and his example, many men converted he to the faith of Christ."

How much of this is historical and how much pure legend it is impossible to say. But when men are brought into touch with Christ by personal examination of His teachings and through His Spirit, there is little fear of the result. He is His own apologetic. The effects of His work are immeasurable, but they can be seen. He has shaped the in-

dividual soul, moulded the policies of nations, directed the destinies of the race. And doing what no other has done in the same way—revealing, heartening, and redeeming—He cannot be more aptly described than in the words of this officer of the guard, "Truly, this Man was the Son of God."

XV

MARY AND HER FRIENDS

"There stood by the cross of Jesus, His mother and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene."
—JOHN 19:25.

FIDELITY, thy name is woman! Nothing is more astonishing, in view of all the facts, than the devotion of these women to the crucified Nazarene. They were powerless in face of that howling mob. They could expect neither mercy for their loved One, nor consideration for themselves. Yet they must perforce remain to the end. Even when the lamp of being at last flickered out, the flame of their loyalty still burned brightly and, lingering, cast a beam of light athwart the black canopy of night. Though these women differ from one another, they have this in common: a feeling of gratitude and love which nothing can diminish. Of the four, one is overwhelmed with grief. The others minister to her as best they can. But the bowed head, the form quivering with grief, the tearful glances shot now and then in the direction of the cross, rivet our attention. We need not ask who she is; it must be His mother. Poor Mary! what poignant memories and bitter thoughts are hers in that fearful hour. Although we cannot give her the exalted place which

the Roman Church has assigned to her, we may not withhold our reverent love and sympathy in such an experience.

She had toiled up the steep ascent leading to Golgotha, with tumult in her soul. Her friends endeavoured to dissuade her from her project, but her heart would brook no denial. She did not know what she intended to do; she dared not think. Her first impulse was to flee from the scene, and fling herself into one of the gorges where the rock's jagged fangs awaited such victims of despair. But the next moment she was impelled to rush wildly into the midst of the crowd, to denounce their fiendishness, and if need be, die with the Son of her bosom. It needed all the resource of her companions to restrain her hysterical grief. The reaction left her nerveless and trembling. A desolating sense of helplessness swept over her. Sorrow stalked into her soul, and bade Memory follow with her bitter-sweet fruits.

That unforgettable day of the Annunciation, the exaltation of spirit which was afterwards followed by inevitable misunderstandings, came back to her, bathed in the pure light of God's gracious dealings. Bethlehem with its inhuman indifference, and its almost superhuman tenderness as some came seeking the new-born King, gave place to Herod's horrible malice. She recalled the escape to Egypt, hearing the wailing of women like herself as she and Joseph journeyed through the night. And while she pressed the warm body of her Child to her breast, she knew they would be raining kisses on little faces that would never answer their smiles again. Agony such as theirs was now repeated in her experience. Yea, the

words of the aged Simeon came back. With glowing face, he had blessed God for the coming of that Child. Had he stopped with that, how her soul would have rejoiced. But there followed those cryptic words, "This Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against. Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also."

Many a time subsequently had she pondered that prophecy. Although the wants of her little household kept her fully occupied, she found her mind dwelling on that suggestion of coming sorrow. Then with the vividness of a thunder-bolt, the meaning came. She was teaching Jesus to walk. Standing at one end of the room, she bade Him come to her, and He stretched out His tiny arms in childish glee as He responded. The morning sunlight shone through the window behind Him, thus throwing His shadow on the floor. The figure of a cross lay between them! It was her first glimpse of the impalpable yet menacing shadow cast by the future. As only a mother could, she drove this thought from her heart. And yet she knew that, although she shut the door fast upon it, it lurked without only waiting for a chance to enter again.

The years sped past. The visit to the Temple when Jesus was about twelve was one of the outstanding events of those even-flowing days. Yet again, His "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" filled her soul with wonderment. Then when He took His place with Joseph in the workshop, again the shadow! Mary had gone to call her Son to the evening meal. He had been toiling without respite through the day. At the sound

of her voice, He laid down His tools, and greeted her with a welcoming smile. He raised His arms above His head, straightening His back with a sigh of fatigue. And at that instant, the setting sun shining through the open door, threw His shadow on the wall of the workshop. Once more it was the figure of the crucified.

Now Mary wrapped her face in her mantle at the recollection. But as though she were not already suffering enough, she thought of how she had failed Him. Notwithstanding all His love, His unwearying labour for the family bereft of its bread-winner, she had not understood Him. There was that day when she listened to her neighbours rather than to her own heart. Jesus had created a sensation. To assume the rôle of the prophet was serious enough, but to apply to Himself those words which were rightly regarded as befitting only the Messiah seemed profane. And to the consternation of the little synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus had quite definitely said, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears." They cast Him out. But the echoes of the storm penetrated the home. Mary's other children joined the critics. They demanded that something should be done, if not for the sake of the family, then for the sake of Jesus Himself. They had reached a conclusion which the facts seemed to warrant: He was not responsible for His actions! "He is beside Himself." They found Him preaching at a certain house, with a great crowd round Him, and resorting to a ruse to get Him quietly into their power, they sent a message in to Him: His mother and His brethren desired to speak with Him. His mother? That would be indeed a bitter

blow. Jesus could make allowance for the others, but He had always counted on her sympathy. Misunderstood! And only now did Mary grasp what it must have meant to Him. She had missed the significance of His life, yea, just as shamefully as the rabble around that cross. Her responsibility was even greater than theirs. Perhaps nothing more could be expected of them, but she—how could she have been so blind!

Her mind was made up. She no longer wished to avoid those searching eyes. She would go right to the cross, cost what it might; she would declare openly to the world, if it cared aught for her confession, that she not only loved, but also believed in, that Divine Son of God. But again her friends tried to hold her back. A movement of Salome's head brought help from another quarter. Somewhere from the edge of the multitude, a man approached. It was John, Salome's son and Christ's most intimate friend. He put his arms about this woman with the pallid, pain-lined face, and learning from his mother what Mary wished to do, he joined in trying to change her mind. Such a course would accomplish nothing. When the people whose taste for blood had been whetted saw their Victim's mother there, it would rouse their fury anew. Would they show her any pity? Even though they might not offer any violence to her, they would add their malicious jests to the agony she was already enduring. Such protests were useless! John knew it almost before he had finished speaking. Mary was determined. She did not wish to involve them, but go she would! So they went with her. John's heart misgave him for his own instability, and now

if this meant suffering or even death, it was only what he merited. But when at last they made their way through the jostling throng, and reached the foot of the cross, they felt they had waited too long. The eyes were closed. Mary looked up at that dear face which she had held to her breast, and which she had kissed so tenderly. The blood from the thorn-prints had trickled down, and congealed, accentuating the pallor of Christ's countenance. And now He would never know how deep the love of His mother's heart, nor receive her confession of penitence. Old Simeon was right; the sword pierced her soul. In spite of her resolve to retain her self-control, she could no longer contain herself, and she gave way to passionate laments. It were good that it was so.

". . . Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak
Whispers the o'erfraught heart, and bids it break."

The plea of the contrite is wrung from her lips, but she would never hear the consoling word of His forgiveness!

The sound of a well-loved voice reached the Saviour's heart. Perhaps there were even more subtle influences which told Him that His mother was present to share the last moments of His sufferings. He opened His eyes. They stood—Mary and her friends—wishing they could stifle the beating of their hearts lest He should speak, and His voice be too faint for them to hear. He smiled to see them. It was not only the sight of His mother's devotion which sent a ray of joy through His heart, but also the fact that His disciple had conquered his fears

enough to show pity to that stricken mother. And Jesus said, "Woman, behold thy son. . . . Son, behold thy mother!" They understood. Mary knew that Christ's heart had lost none of its tenderness for her, and that He had already divined the love which had brought her now to His feet. He seemed to know that she was there through the high impulse of motherhood, and the higher promptings of the Divine. But why this thought for her future? Because Mary would yet have to pay for this outburst of love. His brethren would not readily forgive her open acknowledgment of One on whom rested the stigma of the cross. She would need a home; she would sorely lack love and sympathy. While John himself, when he realized his own sad declension, would need some heart on which to lavish the love of his impassioned soul. In each other's plight, they might find mutual consolation and peace.

Our hearts go out to this poor mother. Yet if we allow our own dear ones to pass on life's way, growing ever more solitary because we fail to understand and sympathize, if we withhold the cheer and encouragement that we can give, then such thought for Mary were in vain. It were as waters running to waste, serving no useful purpose, bringing not fertility, but only a marsh, dank and depressing. But there is a sequel to this poignant story. We may with Mary:

> "Trace the rainbow through the rain,
> And feel the promise is not vain
> That morn shall tearless be."

The scene changes to the Upper Room. The resurrection has thrown its hopeful light into the hearts of the sorrowful. The Apostles are there with their fellow-believers. And among them is Mary—yea, "Mary, the mother of Jesus, with His brethren." (Acts 1:14). Those same brethren who failed to understand Jesus in the home and through His ministry, have been won over by a mother's faith and prayers. James, as we know, afterwards filled a position of eminence in the Church. And if Monica led her son from a life of careless revelry, and gave Augustine to the cause of Christ, is it incredible that Mary also succeeded? Most sons who achieve greatness and fame do so because of their mothers; Mary's claim to regard and reverence is due to her Son, and we gladly remember the love and devotion she showed to Him.

Salome, the wife of Zebedee, was also at the cross. She is generally assumed to be Mary's sister. If they were sisters, that would make her two sons, James and John, first cousins of Jesus. And that in turn throws some light on the incident with which her name is usually associated. She made an ambitious request on behalf of her sons. It was that they might sit on either side of Christ's throne when He came to His kingdom. If Salome were thus related to Jesus, her request becomes not only reasonable, but also natural. What could seem fairer to a doting mother than that her sons, who had believed in Jesus when His own brethren did not, and who had left everything for His sake, should be repaid for their trust? But from Christ's standpoint, we can see that it was impossible. Even were He

disposed to grant such a request, He could not do so merely for family reasons. His decision brought disappointment to those concerned, but that was a blessing in disguise. When the mists clear, reality can be better discerned. The scorn with which the rest of the Apostles regarded the petition, no less than the plain disapproval of the Master, led both James and John to a deeper apprehension of spiritual things. That searching word Christ spoke about the cup of suffering challenged their manhood. Valiantly they declared their willingness to share whatever the future held, and doubtless there was more than empty vaunt in their hearts. Yet as they afterwards looked at their ambitious desire, it seemed the height of presumption; it savoured of intrigue. They could live down the unfortunate incident only by showing resolute loyalty and obedience.

The effects of that day were long felt. Salome also began to see things differently. And although her dearest wish for her sons was denied, with deepened sympathy, she entered into Christ's work. She became one of His supporters. Then at the last, she shared the vigil of Mary, His mother. There were many things she could not fathom. Christ's reference to His Father, and to the Kingdom, were inexplicable, considering that she was intimate with His home circle. Still, faith had begun, and she saw glimpses of spiritual altitudes which though inaccessible, were nevertheless real. She had never doubted Christ's sincerity, and she had no patience with His brethren who tried to cast a doubt even on His sanity. Had they done as much for their mother as Jesus had, they might have some

ground for being critical. As it was, she viewed her Kinsman in as detached a way as possible, and her opinion changed with the passing of time. She had agreed with the rest when Jesus left the workshop, and when she saw the business which Joseph had toiled to build up pass into the hands of strangers. She had blamed Jesus for this sudden desire for publicity, and had wondered how Mary was to live. Yet she could not forget some things learned from Mary's lips long ago. Mary had since hidden them in her heart, and declined to discuss them. But Salome had talked of them with Zebedee. Then when their two sons decided to devote their lives to this new mission, her concern was even greater. Rumours of strange happenings swept the quiet countryside like a forest fire. What did this talk of the Kingdom mean?

Salome's convictions slowly took shape in spite of the rebuff her hopes had received. She too had felt the power of that wondrous life, and though she could not reconcile the public ministry and the Messianic claims with the humble home and quiet upbringing, yet she felt, rather than understood, there were facts which her philosophy could not encircle. And this was the end of it all? She had no love for Annas and Caiaphas, nor for their fellow-conspirators. Had faith in God depended solely on such a flimsy foundation, it would have gone ill with her. But in any case, no matter what were the rights or wrongs of the situation at that juncture, Mary had need of support and sympathy, and so Salome was there. Her function was not only to minister to the living, but also to bring her spices for the embalming of the dead, and in both

was she blest. Happy is the heart that, despite its disappointments, even its apparently unanswered prayers, can retain its affection for Christ, without diminution. Salome, were she remembered only for her petition on behalf of her sons, would not merit a large place in our regard. As it is, faith which passes beyond the limits of sight, love that continues its gracious ministrations when life has fled, calls for admiration and praise. And if we can rejoice the heart of the Saviour, as did Salome, forgetting our own needs in that of others, and bringing comfort to aching souls, life shall not have been in vain.

The third woman in that group was Mary, the wife of Clopas. She is one of those fine women whose lives are their only memorial. But though the record of their deeds may pass, the fragrance lingers through the years. A distinguished preacher of our acquaintance was a periodical visitor at a certain house, and he asked his host on one occasion how it was there was always the perfume of roses in the room where they sat. The gentleman went to a cabinet, from which he took a portion of cotton-wool, in which were embedded several fragments of glass. "This is the reason," he said. Then he explained that a vial of Attar of Roses had been sent from abroad, but afterwards it had been accidentally broken. The precious fluid was gathered up with that wad of wool, and the pieces of glass also kept, and although it had happened some years before, the scent of roses remained. It was thus with Mary of Clopas. We know very little about her, but she was one of those fine women who assisted Jesus with their substance during His itinerant

preaching. She was also sufficiently intimate with Mary the mother to share that trying vigil with her.

We need not attempt to pierce the veil which shrouds her identity. The narratives are not very explicit. Yet from Mark's Gospel we gather this interesting fact: She gave two sons to Christ's service. James the Less was one of the Twelve, and although, like his mother, his unobtrusive gifts receive no meed of praise, the place Jesus gave him in the Apostolic company testifies to his worth. Her other son, Joses, was also known to the Church. And their mother who had done what she could during Christ's life, proves how warm her attachment to Him, for she was there when the stricken body was laid in the sepulchre. She and Mary Magdalene remained even after the stone had been rolled across the aperture of the tomb. And the last to leave, they were also first to arrive the third morning that they might render the final service to One so beloved.

That is indicative of Mary of Clopas's love for Christ, and such love is a sublime dynamic. It may not move in conventional ways. The chances are that it will not. Yet it moves, and its course is ever beneficent. What lighted such a flame of deathless affection in this woman's heart? We need not speculate. The answer is found in her designation, "Mary . . . the mother of James and Joses." What Christ had done for them made her do this for Him. "He who places his hand on a child's head," says a famous old Scots divine, "places his hand on a mother's heart." Christ demonstrates the truth of it. He laid hold of these two sons in a

vital way, and life could never be the same either for them or their mother. It is not difficult to read between the lines. Only a mother knows with what grave concern the opening years of manhood can fill a mother's heart. James and John were no exceptions. Perhaps they had given some cause for disquietude in that home. The father had been severe, even indignant. It had no effect. They regarded him as narrow, knowing nothing about the world with its changing ideas and customs, and therefore he could not be expected to make any allowance. The mother joined her pleas to his rebukes; it had been just as futile. She could not possibly know the allurements of the city, nor its fascination for the young. So months passed into years. The sons were not exactly vicious; they were careless and indifferent. The God of their parents did not make any appeal to them! It was possibly the fault of religion. Those who posed as the chief exponents of it had long ago fallen beneath their contempt. And meanwhile, James and Joses deteriorated. If they no longer cared what their parents felt, they were still a matter of serious concern to them, and home was sadly shadowed.

Then a change came over them. No one knew what had happened. None dared to enquire. Their resentment under previous inquisitions restrained both the father and mother. But a new spirit was evident. From indifference, they passed to a considerateness which was phenomenal. From moving in selfish ways, life found a new orbit. And when James intimated that he had decided to leave the daily craft to become an associate of the Galilæan Teacher, the secret was out.

". . . We are in God's hand,
How strange now looks the life He makes us lead:
So free we seem, so fettered fast are we!
I feel He laid the fetter: let it lie!"

Joses shamefacedly admitted that he too was a follower of Christ. He had not been summoned to the Apostolate. That did not alter the regard he felt for this gracious Master. And from that hour, home was a new place for Clopas and his wife. Instead of continual friction due to his attempts to assert his authority, there was harmony. Instead of tumult as the sons resisted, there was peace. Christ had done that for that home. Was it too much then to show their gratitude to Him in any way possible?

"Anything we can do for Jesus or for His work," remarked Clopas, "let us do it. If I were a younger man, I would be away myself on such a task as James has chosen. Perhaps there is some way we could show our gratitude for what Jesus has done for our sons. What thinkest thou?"

And Mary had shown what she thought by sending supplies occasionally, and even going herself, ostensibly to see her son, but also to have the opportunity of knowing Christ better. Every effect must have an adequate cause, is the dictum of Science. That being so, we can gauge the Master's power by the unquenchable love He roused in this mother's heart. And that also explains her tireless vigil at the cross and at the sepulchre. "'Tis a great and mysterious gift, this clinging of the heart," says George Eliot in *Felix Holt,* "whereby it hath often seemed to me that, even in the very moment

of suffering, souls have the keenest foretaste of heaven. I speak not lightly, but as one who has endured. And 'tis a strange truth that only in the agony of parting we look into the depths of love."

Nor was Mary of Clopas alone in such regard as we see from her companion, Mary Magdalene. If the former had cause for gratitude the latter had a thousand times more. Probably it is she whom we first meet in the house of Simon, the Pharisee. The lordly leader had, either from a wish to study the Nazarene at first hand, or from some reason he could scarcely define, invited Jesus to the evening meal. The Master would not be unduly elated by such a request. Had He been so, He would have soon been brought low. He was a guest, but it was evident that He was not ranked any higher than the social plane of His rough followers. He was being patronized. The usual courtesies were lacking. Jesus felt before long that He was there on sufferance, and though denied the niceties of eastern etiquette, their absence would not be likely to be noted by such as He! Yet Jesus did not show any resentment. The meal proceeded smoothly, and if Simon had any ulterior motive in inviting the Teacher, none could have suspected it. In spite of himself, he felt the influence of this exalted Man. Jesus seemed to invest everything with new glory, and Simon's heart, long dulled into insensibility, felt a strange glow as they conversed. The guest was well-informed on any subject broached. His genial smile, His ready wit, His striking personality, tended to make any subtle scheme which the Pharisee might have had in mind seem impracticable.

An unexpected interruption took place. In ac-

cordance with the customs of the time, the banqueting-chamber was open to the courtyard, through which any might pass. And as they were talking, Simon caught a glimpse of a woman who had entered. Even though he were unable to recognize the type, her unbraided hair—the badge of her class—would have given him the clue. She had stolen in, but Jesus engrossed in conversation, had evidently not noticed her. This gave Simon an opportunity. He did not wish to make a scene; he knew the Nazarene was somewhat unconventional, and He might take the woman's part. But if he could signal one of the servants, and have her quietly removed, no harm would be done. But the woman had some object in her coming. Wiping Christ's unsandalled feet on which her tears had fallen, she anointed them with the costly spikenard she carried. And Simon's soul flamed with anger. Now he knew! He had always cherished doubts about Jesus and "this Man, if He were a prophet, would have known who, and what manner of woman this is."

Christ read the hearts of both the sanctimonious and the sinful. He did not pay any immediate attention to the woman, but relating to Simon the story of the two creditors, He secured the answer that he who had been forgiven most would love most. That was just what the Master wanted, and He applied the unexpected rebuke. It was tremendous! "Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest Me no water for My feet: but she hath washed My feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest Me no kiss: but this woman, since the time I came in, hath not

ceased to kiss My feet. . . . Wherefore I say unto thee, her sins which are many are forgiven; for she loved much!"

Was this Mary Magdalene? The weight of evidence seems to point to that fact. She was from Magdala, a city which was both wealthy and morally corrupt. She is mentioned as one out of whom Christ cast seven devils—that being synonymous with complete abandonment to evil. We can then understand her inexpressible gratitude to such a deliverer. He had lifted her from the miry clay, and set her feet on a rock. How could she repay Him? Others had looked on her with leering eyes, or with that scorn which was harder to endure. But He?—He had seen not only a woman who was a sinner, but also a sinner who was a woman. All that remained in her of womanliness sprang into life at His word. He did not condone her sin; He forgave it. He set her free from the noisome defilement of her past. Well has Hartley Coleridge put it:

> "She stooped, and with her untressed hair
> Still wiped the feet she was so blest to touch;
> And Christ wiped off the soiling of despair
> From her fair soul, because she loved so much."

Through subsequent days, Mary Magdalene lost no chance of listening to that gracious voice, of seeing others as despairing as she had been, brought back to life and given hope for the new pathway. She noted too, and it was just as wonderful to her eyes, that dormant seeds of goodness and purity were springing up to glorious life. What a Saviour

she had found! And that was why she of all women braved the contempt which the rulers might display, or the insults the crowd might fling at her, as she came to His cross. She honoured the Master with a love that nothing could fully express. And though her soul was melted at the sight of His pain, yet it was something to relieve the heart of His mother, and to show any devotion in her power.

Long after the sun set, she hovered about the garden with its sepulchre. It was only because she saw that while she remained His mother would not go home, that she returned to her lodging. Yet it seemed the hours would never pass. She had lost everything that made life bearable. She could not weep; the fountain of her grief was dry. She went forth to her friend, Mary of Clopas, and finding that she was in a similar plight, they decided to go back together to the tomb. The Magdalene had no dread of the dark, deserted streets, and reassured her companion as they threaded their way to the Garden. Hand in hand they walked, too sorrowful for words, but as they reached the path leading to the spot, they overtook Salome. She too had anticipated the hour of meeting, and together they went on their way. The moon came from behind a cloud as they drew near, bathing everything in its silvern light as they entered the enclosure. They bore the necessary spices, and only then did it occur to them that they would have difficulty in removing the stone. The circular disc usually ran in grooves, but it would be beyond their strength to roll it back. Like ourselves, they were anticipating their difficulties. We are prone to meet our troubles—crossing the stream in thought long before it comes in sight! And many

a burden which tends to crush the spirit is seen afterwards to have been unnecessary.

As they approached the guard, standing like statues against the sky, there was a shaking of the earth, a flash of light, and a glorious though incomprehensible vision. The stone was removed. While it is admittedly difficult to fit all the details together, the stories of the four Evangelists are none the less reliable. In the circumstances, it would be strange if there were no divergence when an event so unparalleled were described. That does not affect the fact of the resurrection itself; on the contrary, it tends to substantiate the truth of it. It would seem that while Mary and the other women went to tell the disciples what they had seen, Mary returned in the wake of Peter and John. Neither of the men had credited the story, but they ran to the sepulchre to see for themselves. Mary got back to find that they had left probably to acquaint the others with the fact that the Lord had risen, and she now saw in the growing light what they had also seen. The tomb was empty, and the grave clothes were lying where the body had been. Two men spoke to her. Concluding that they were connected with the estate, in reply to their enquiry as to her tears, she replied, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him." Her theory was that, owing to some misapprehension of Joseph's purpose, the body had been allowed to remain in the tomb only overnight, expecting that some of Christ's friends would be coming to claim it. That is consistent with her words to the third speaker. "She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, Sir, if thou hast borne Him hence,

tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away."

"If love lives through all life," cries Thackeray, "and survives through all sorrow, and remains steadfast to us through all changes, and in all darkness of spirit burns brightly, and if we die deplores us ever, and still equally loves, and exists with the very last gasp and throb of the faithful bosom—whence it passes with the pure soul beyond death, surely it shall be immortal! Though we who remain are separated from it, is it not ours in heaven? If we love still those we lose, can we altogether lose those we love?" Mary had not altogether lost her Saviour, but the sense of His withdrawal shows how much He counted in her life. Yet even more can be gauged by the ecstatic joy with which she rediscovered Him. It was not the gardener, but Christ Himself! Looking at this woman with her down-turned head, as she tried to stem her tears, He uttered her name—"Mary!" It was enough! She had heard that name before on those sacred lips, and at once her soul leapt up in response. "Rabboni!"—my Master! It was her own name for Jesus. The Hebrew title described Him to her heart as no other word could. He had verily mastered her who had else been a slave to perverted instincts and blind passion. He had led her, cleansed, subdued, and grateful, freed, and yet for ever the slave of God. And she had proved as others have since, that His service is perfect freedom. Exultant joy needed the language of the heart, and religion's most sacred memories.

Ian Maclaren, in *Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush,* describes the homecoming of Flora Campbell. The

motherless girl had quitted the glen, unable to endure any longer the harsh and dour father who never seemed to understand the longings of her heart. But neither had she understood him. Assured by Marget Howe's letter that her father was longing for her with a heart almost breaking in spite of his former pride, Flora came back from London.

"She had made up some kind of speech, but the only word she ever said was 'Father!' for Lachlan, who had never even kissed her all the days of her youth, clasped her in his arms and sobbed out blessings over her head, while the dogs licked her hands with their soft, kindly tongues. 'It is a pity you hef not the Gaelic,' Flora said to Marget afterwards. 'It iss the best of all languages for loving. There are fifty words for Darling, and my father will be calling me every one that night I came home.'"

What the Gaelic was to Flora Campbell, Hebrew was to Mary Magdalene—the language of the heart. And to her, seeking to express the love awakened in her once sinful soul, was granted the first vision of the Saviour. Is it not ever thus with great lovers of Christ? He meets them in all manner of unexpected ways. He speaks to them, revealing some greater glory of His risen power. And most frequently is it when the soul is cast down, when the eyes are dim with life's sorrows, and faith is threatened with extinction. His disciples, toiling once amid the turbulent waters of Galilee, saw Him approaching in the hour of their peril. And to every faithful heart, tried by perplexity or grief,

shall the immortal lines of Francis Thompson be a prophecy:

> "Lo, Christ walking on the water,
> Not of Gennesareth, but Thames."

Ruskin has much to say of womanhood, and commenting on Tennyson's line, "I am here at the gate alone," he asks: "Who is it, think you, who stands at the gate of this sweeter garden, alone, waiting for you? Did you ever hear, not of a Maud, but a Magdalene, who went down to her garden in the dawn, and found One waiting at the gate, whom she supposed to be the gardener? Have you not sought Him often; sought Him in vain, all through the night; sought Him in vain at the gate of that old garden where the fiery sword is set? He is never there; but at the gate of this garden. He is waiting always—waiting to take your hand—ready to go down to see the fruits of the valley, to see whether the vine has flourished and the pomegranate budded."

Where a loving heart seeks Him, there shall Christ be found. And the result is ever the same. Faith is rewarded with fuller vision, the heart is thrilled with His word of fadeless love and with His real presence. For His word stands sure: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

XVI

JOSEPH OF ARIMATHÆA

"Joseph of Arimathæa, an honourable counsellor, which also waited for the kingdom of God."

—MARK 15:43.

"WHAT is to be done now?" Joseph of Arimathæa looked into the troubled face of his friend, Nicodemus. The question scarcely needed an answer. The babel of those bent on enjoying the spectacle to the full broke on their ears. It was like the raging of billows on a rock-bound coast. They felt it unwise to go nearer, for there was the chance of personal affront if not violence. Their fellow-councillors would not scruple to incite the crowd against those who had tried to befriend the Galilæan. But their hearts swelled with indignation as they thought of what was going on. Never in the history of their nation had such a shameful pretence passed for justice.

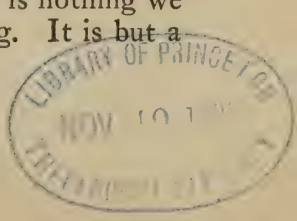
"I fear there is nothing we can do." Nicodemus passed his hand across his brow as though to brush away spectres of sorrow. "The time is past," he went on. "When I recall how patiently He spake to me that night, talking of the second birth, when I think of the love-light in those eyes, and then turn to what has befallen Him, my heart is heavy indeed.

I am filled with despair. Why did we not speak out boldly on His behalf while we might?"

"But thou didst, my friend. Greatly did I marvel at thy courage as, long ago, thou didst demand if our law judged a man without first hearing him. Thou didst make a deep stir in more souls than mine. Methought it might even go well with the Galilæan because of thy word. Yet Annas is too crafty to let his prey pass once it comes within reach of his talons. And as thou knowest full well, this Caiaphas is only a tool in his wicked hands. Still, my heart reproacheth me now that I did not stand bravely by thy side, for though I have not divulged this to thee before, I love yonder Master as my own soul. Yea, only now can I measure His worth unto my life."

"And I love Him also," said Nicodemus. "Had I been able to give my old life for His, gladly would I have done so, but now. . . . Hark! what meaneth that?" A crash of thunder, followed by startled cries from some of the people, and darkness began to shut out the sky while the earth quivered under their feet. They turned towards the city, and then both stopped irresolute, looking back in the direction of the hill-crest. Nicodemus laid his hand on the other's arm. "Methinks Jehovah doth show His wrath against our nation because of the blindness of our hearts. We had the light, but shamefully chose darkness; and now the darkness hath been sent as our portion. Would that we had died with Him! But it is too late now."

"Alas! thou hast well said. There is nothing we can do. Let us return to my dwelling. It is but a



few paces within the gates if we can but trace the path thereto."

In the house of Joseph, lamps had been set to banish the dimness of the apartment as he and Nicodemus entered. He flung himself wearily on a divan, and with a wave of the hand indicated the appointments of the sumptuously-furnished room. "With all my wealth, and the honoured name I bear, and yet I am poorer than the veriest beggar who even now howls himself hoarse with fear." The bitterness of remorse was in his tones, and the other sat silent.

At length Nicodemus spoke. "What thinkest thou that they will do with Him afterwards?"

"Thou meanest with the poor mangled body? I fear greatly they will cast it into the Vale of Hinnom where the bones of the wicked lie. To think, O my friend, that those hands which so oft have brought help and healing to multitudes, those feet which sped along ways of sympathy, should know no better resting-place!"

Nicodemus sighed. "Truly, it is shameful!"

"Wait!" cried Joseph, starting to his feet. "By the beard of my father, this shall not be. Both thou and I are filled with grief that we did not do more for this Master while we might. Let us show our love in this. I have in my garden yonder a tomb prepared against the day of my death. We will together give Him decent burial."

"But how can this be? Carest thou not what the Sanhedrin will say? And what thinkest thou will Pilate do when we, who are accounted great in our nation, thus ally ourselves with One who died on

the accursèd tree? Might we not beg His body in secret from the centurion?"

Joseph spoke decisively. "I have thought of that, yet it cannot be. The centurion hath no power to grant our request save by order of the Governor. But I have had enough of cowardice towards this Prince of men. My soul is fired with this project. I will face the anger of Pilate and the sneers of the Council. Can I count on thy help? Surely His love for all men, and our poor love for Him, demand this of us!"

"I am with thee, Joseph. If thine be the tomb, then mine shall be the spices for His embalming."

The gloom had lifted in part, although the day was far spent, when Joseph made his way with beating heart into the audience-chamber of Pilate. The Governor sat with haggard face, staring moodily before him. Joseph's proffered request was curtly refused.

"Have I not been harassed enough by thy Council? My soul is weary with all its plottings and pleas. First it is for this Man's death, and now it is for His body before the breath hath quitted it! Nay! Perchance on the morrow I may hear thee; that shall be time enough."

Some tidings which Joseph had gleaned as he came through the palace prompted him to suggest that death had already taken place. Pilate looked incredulous. Calling the officer of the guard, he found, however, that it was even as Joseph said, and glad to dispose of a troublèsome matter, he gave the required order. Nicodemus was waiting without. Together the two friends made their way to Golgotha. The sacred body was taken down from

the cross and, wrapped in the linen cloths which Nicodemus had brought, it was laid in the sepulchre.

Darkness had fallen. They returned to the city, bowed with a sense of irreparable loss. After awhile, Nicodemus spoke. "Of what art thou thinking, my friend?"

"Only how much better we might have shown our love to Him while the opportunity was ours!"

The conversation which we have overheard makes us ask, who was this Joseph of Arimathæa? Nicodemus we know. He appears early in the Fourth Gospel, but Joseph makes such a tardy entrance. Yet if the esteem in which he was held by the Evangelists be measured by the place they give to him in their pages, he must have been greatly beloved. It was certainly a chivalrous thing which Joseph did. The redeeming features in that day of tragedy are very few; this is one of them. From the material available, we ascertain that Joseph was a man of high character, and deeply religious in the best sense of that much-abused term, for he was also a Pharisee. But that name has an unpleasant connotation. It stood, originally, for strict rectitude and uprightness of conduct, and of the many who bore it unworthily, bringing reproach on the name and on piety in general, there was one at least who "Wore the white flower of a blameless life." That was Joseph of Arimathæa. That he had some claim to learning and sound sense is hinted by the fact that he had been elected to the Sanhedrin. And further, from the fact that he was wealthy as well as devout, we infer that his life had been fruitful in good deeds. The traits he displayed take time to develop, and his generous action in providing for

Christ's interment would not be a solitary instance of his benevolence.

He was more than a man of high principle; he was a Christian. It is true that term had not then been coined. That came later as one of opprobrium. Yet the basic meaning was a soul which had surrendered to the sovereign sway of Christ. We do not know when that happened in Joseph's case. It may be that Nicodemus related what passed between Jesus and himself, and the two friends discussed the matter at such length, that, for his own peace of mind, Joseph was impelled to make enquiries for himself. Perhaps when Jesus was in Jerusalem on various occasions, this man joined the throngs which clustered to hear His words. He would be careful not to make himself conspicuous. Yet as he listened to this great Teacher, he felt he was repaid. He could appreciate what Jesus said. He was well-versed in the Law; it had been his study from his youth up, and he was a recognized authority on its teachings. Yet the Galilæan illumined old passages with a marvellous light such as Joseph had never seen before, and deeper meaning glowed in the familiar words. But the compelling thing was not in Christ's exposition of Sacred Writ, wonderful though it was. It was rather in the fact that He seemed to know so intimately both God from whom the Law came, and man for whom it was intended. The love which shone in His face, the tenderness in His tones, were unquestionable. And Joseph went away thrilled to the core.

It was all so unusual. Joseph had heard his confrères speak scornfully of the unlettered herd; Jesus spoke with encouragement and appreciation.

They had nothing but contempt for such ignorance, lack of aspiration, and shortcomings; Jesus had compassion and love. Strangest of all was this: as Joseph listened, more than once it seemed that the Master was speaking not to the assembly, not to any one section of His audience, but to a single soul—and that was Joseph's. It had been a revelation. Mirrored in that moment he saw his own life. Before, it had appeared fair as the unruffled waters of a summer sea, but now, beneath the surface, he became aware of rotting wrecks of forgotten vows and abandoned aspirations. And Joseph the councillor became Joseph the contrite. He had found salvation. He did not openly acknowledge Jesus as his Master. Perhaps he felt barred from actively assisting Him, owing to the position he filled, and the unwritten law of his caste. It may be that he argued: "It would do the Master more harm than good were I thus publicly to ally myself with Him. Would it not turn some of these wayfarers, to whom He is making such appeal, from His side? They might think that if one of the Elders were counted among His followers, that meant exclusion for them. Besides, it would certainly accentuate the dislike with which the Sanhedrin views Him." So for the time being, Joseph took the line of least resistance, which is often the term by which we dignify the course of self-interest and even of cowardice.

Yet that did not settle the matter. Joseph's head urged discretion; his heart solidly voted for discipleship. He sought the middle path. Possibly he could help Jesus in other ways. Anonymous gifts reached the treasury. They were ascribed to those

who had received some gracious help or healing. And there were other means by which Joseph's regard might be expressed. He knew that the hostility of his colleagues was becoming more intense, and though Joseph at this stage of development lacked determination, he did make some attempts to influence his fellow-senators. But that course proved inadvisable, for his mild protests as the assembly dispersed only incensed his friends. When, later on, he found that the Council had resolved to silence this Teacher by fair means or foul, he formed one of the negligible minority which opposed its policy. Nicodemus and a few more shared his views. They discussed the question time after time, but they concluded that they could only make their protest. They were as children trying to stem the incoming breakers with a rampart of sand, but that was all they could do.

Was it all? He felt self-condemned as he followed the mob to Calvary. He had doubted the wisdom of being seen there at all. He knew how unpopular he had made himself with his associates. He was considering whether he should return, when he encountered Nicodemus. He also had been led thither, and the two watched in mute sorrow the thronging crowd making for the place of execution. The haunting couplet might well express the feelings of both hearts:

> "Of all sad words of tongue and pen,
> The saddest are these: 'It might have been!'"

That explains Joseph's subsequent course. The Jewish law required that a malefactor who was

executed should not remain exposed after nightfall. "His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day." Rome cared nothing for that. Unless some relatives of her victims came to claim the body—when they might, for a consideration, take it and bury it according to their own rites—it was left until the carrion birds had done their work. But with the Passover at hand, the Jews had weighty reasons for demanding that the dead should be removed as quickly as possible. The Elders urged that the victims' legs should be broken to expedite matters, and Pilate had given his consent.

This point may have been raised in the Sanhedrin, and Joseph knowing that the bodies would be flung into the ravine saw his chance. His estate lay near Calvary, and he resolved to use the tomb for his dead Lord. It required some courage, as we have seen, to make such a demand of Pilate, for Joseph knew that the Governor would not be in a gracious mood. Moreover, he had not the slightest claim to the body of Jesus. He was neither a relative nor a disciple. But Joseph knew his man. Where his tongue might fail, his purse would succeed. It was well-known that Pilate was not averse to accepting bribes; in fact, according to Philo, this was one of the counts in the indictment afterwards presented against him. But we can hope that in this case better feelings prevailed. Moved by some little pity for the Man whom he had so grievously wronged, he may have foregone any chance of gain. Yet if he did so, he certainly did not give his consent willingly. His first objection was that Jesus could not be dead so soon. But Professor David

Smith makes an interesting comment on this point. He quotes the medical evidence regarding Christ's death, and it bears striking testimony to the anguish Jesus endured. "Jesus died literally of a broken heart—of 'agony of mind, producing rupture of the heart.' In that awful hour when He was forsaken by the Father, His heart swelled with grief until it burst, and then the blood was 'effused into the distended sac of the pericardium, and afterwards separated, as is usual with extravasated blood, into these two parts, viz., (1) crassamentum or red clot, and (2) watery serum.' When the distended sac was pierced from beneath, it discharged 'its sanguineous contents in the form of red clots of blood and a stream of watery serum, exactly corresponding to the description given in the sacred narrative, and forthwith came there out blood and water.' "

When Pilate ascertained that Jesus was indeed dead, either there was no further difficulty he could raise, or else he was eminently anxious to rid himself of the matter. He gave the requisite permission, and Joseph and his friend made their way back to Calvary. But we see the character of this man slowly taking shape. His strength of purpose in requesting the body from Pilate is equalled only by his disregard of the ostracism which would follow. And further proof of the love he felt was in the fact that he sought to carry out the last sad offices for the dead with his own hands. No servant of his household should be allowed to take the most menial part of love's service from him and his friend. There were only the women, clustered in tender fidelity about the cross, when they reached it, and gladly they lent their aid. How in the gather-

ing night they extracted the nails without further lacerating the sacred hands, we do not know. Perhaps the soldiers were taking down the other two, and their help was enlisted. But at last the body was wrapped about with the linen cloths and spices, and the mournful procession made its way to the quiet garden. There they laid Him, and with Him, what? The hopes and fragrant memories which now all seemed but a mockery. The one heart which understood all others lay still in the silence of death. The gracious Master was no more! And echoing in the disconsolate soul of Joseph was the dirge of the good which might have been. "The setting of a great hope," writes Longfellow, "is like the setting of the sun. The brightness of our life is gone. Shadows of evening fall around us and the world seems but a dim reflection—itself a broader shadow. We look forward into the coming night. The soul withdraws into itself. The stars arise, and the night is lonely." And so Joseph felt. Why had he allowed his opportunities to pass unused? Why had he arrayed Timidity in the vestment called Expediency, and confused discretion with duty? Sins of omission are as real as those of commission. Jesus emphasized that when He told of the priest and Levite who left the stricken traveller unaided by the way. And Joseph began to feel that even a negation might have positive effects. If in after days Saul, by consenting unto Stephen's martyrdom, even though he only held the garments of the slayers, felt his guilt, Joseph was conscious of the same thing. By not openly avowing his allegiance to Christ, by failing to champion the right, he had condoned the wrong.

There is something here which we cannot ignore. We are not far removed from Joseph. Though the centuries lie between ourselves and him, the canyon is bridged by a common experience. To few indeed is it given to remember their fellowship with their kindred and friends without regrets.

"Who looking backward from his manhood's prime,
Sees not the spectre of his misspent time;
And through the shade
Of funereal cypress planted thick behind,
Hears no reproachful whisper on the wind
From his beloved dead?"

There are kindly deeds which might have lifted another's load. We have wrapped them away in the drawers of memory, like flowers that died where they bloomed without gladdening a single heart, and now are mere husks of their former selves. There are plans we meant to use for the advancement or blessing of another life. We find them dusty, and brown at the edges, like the drawings of some budding architect who dreamed without doing; those plans never materialized. It is not that we depreciate Joseph's thought for the Crucified. That was a magnanimous deed, and the telling of it will awaken a throb of approval while human hearts beat. We simply set on it the value Joseph did; his feeling was that it amounted to very little at best. Had he done something to cheer Christ's life, to strengthen His hands, what a difference it would have made! The time for such words of devotion is not when the ear is dull in death, but when it aches with the chill indifference of the world. The need for a hand that gives a sense of companionship in its touch has

passed when mortality claims its own. As has been said for each of us: "I shall pass through this world but once. If, therefore, there be any kindness I can show, or any good thing I can do, let me do it now; let me not defer it nor neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again."

There is a further thought concerning Joseph which is rich in suggestion. Why was he designated "of Arimathæa"? Ramathaim, or Beit-Rima, which Sir George Adam Smith identifies with the ancient Arimathæa, was a western town on the borders of Philistia. It was situated about thirteen miles from Lydda. That does not convey much until we refer to the map; then we get the approximate location. Lydda, a city of stirring memories, had been the scene of intense patriotic fervour as early as 44 B.C. Its citizens, refusing to pay the Roman levies, were sold as slaves. But the interest changes to later times. After Pentecost, when the Apostolic band was reconstituted, Peter travelled afield proclaiming the Gospel message. He reached the distant city of Lydda. Did he come to bring the news of Christ's sacrifice on Calvary? Nay, for the tidings had already penetrated to that region. We read, "He came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda." That is remarkable. The only means by which news travelled in those times was through some personal contact. Is it then only a coincidence that Joseph was known as "of Arimathæa"? If it were, it is singular that belonging to a city so far from Jerusalem, he should yet have both his estate and his tomb adjacent to Golgotha.

If we pursue the line a little further, it will bring

us in sight of an important development. Mastering his diffidence in securing Christ's body, Joseph had also come to a newly-discovered self. He was impelled to declare His love for the Master, and so he possibly shared the mighty experience granted to the Apostles and their friends at Pentecost. Then the commission came to Joseph as well as to the rest. He may have been born in Arimathæa, though now a resident of Jerusalem. If that were his birthplace, and the city where his friends still lived, he would naturally turn there in fulfilment of his commission. His own placid, self-centred life had been saved from destruction. The crowning blessing of mankind had been given to him. He must tell the story of the Saviour's grace. So where the other disciples were not likely to come, Joseph went to bear witness to the truth.

The soil was ready for the seed. One bearing news of the Messiah's kingdom would make instant appeal to men of such ancestry. Consequently, when Peter came there afterwards, it was to find that the faith was already established. Did he stumble on the discovery? It is probable that he learned there was a company of believers there. Such is the impression we gain from Luke's story. Peter's object, therefore, was to encourage and consolidate the new cause. Whether Joseph had his antecedents in that city or not, this would account for the title assigned to him. Not only would it distinguish him from other men who bore the same name, but it would also be that mark of honour which is still bestowed on men who have rendered exceptional service. We couple their names with the place of their chief ex-

ploits. This applies not only to famous soldiers, but to the even more worthy warriors of truth and liberty. Parker, of the City Temple, and Dale of Birmingham, need no added word to say who they were or what they did. Henry Ward Beecher will be associated not with Litchfield, Conn., where he was born, but with Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, where he laboured with titanic strength. Lincoln belongs not to Springfield, but to the whole world. And the same thing is true of Joseph of Arimathæa, who gave his best not only to the stricken Master, but also to his risen Lord.

Perhaps Joseph had come to see, as George Eliot puts it: "Life is a reckoning we cannot make twice over. You can't mend a wrong subtraction by doing your addition right." But if Joseph had made mistakes, he strove to render the fullest reparation in his power. To become the ambassador of Christ would be a costly quest for one such as he. Position, privilege, home and friends, would be largely sacrificed. But the heart which gave Christ the sepulchre felt that He was worthy of the best. And that is the conviction of every devoted soul. How far Joseph travelled in his desire to tell of the Saviour's love we do not know. But many will recall the legend linking him with Glastonbury, in England. It says that he had been warned in a vision not to end his voyage until he came to a hill "most like Tabor's holy mount." He came eventually to the mounds which overlook Glastonbury, and seeing the rounded Tor rising above the plain, felt this to be his goal. "We be weary all," said the saint, and there on Wirral (or, Weary-all) Hill, he planted his staff.

According to William of Malmesbury, Joseph settled in Somerset, having with him the Holy Grail, the cup from which Jesus was supposed to have drunk at the Last Supper, and in which also Joseph had caught some of the sacred blood. Here he founded the first Christian Church in Britain. His pilgrim staff took root, and growing miraculously into a holy thorn, blossomed each Christmas Eve, till the axe of a Puritan laid it low. The romance of the Holy Grail is deeply woven into the folk-lore of England. Spenser, for instance, says:

> "Hither came Joseph of Arimathy,
> Who brought with him the Holy Grayle (they say),
> And preacht the truth."

While Malory, Tennyson, Lowell, and others, have used the material in various ways. Yet while this, of necessity, gives an air of unreality to Joseph's work, we cannot forget that beneath the mythical there may be some basic facts. At least there are truths which have a practical bearing on life. Prof. J. R. Seeley's oft-quoted maxim gives us the secret of this disciple's life. "No heart is pure that is not passionate; no virtue is safe that is not enthusiastic." The Glastonbury legend suggests that Joseph's love, breaking its fetters all too late, was yet unencompassable by any bounds of self-interest. It must go forth on its new path, unwearying and undaunted. The tidings of Calvary's victorious Victim must be for every ear.

Now the power of such an impassioned soul cannot be put in measurable terms. The staff, the symbol of its pilgrim life, blossoms with the years,

giving forth beauty and sweet perfume. And that is emblematic of the Christian. Ralph Connor gives us a striking parallel to this in the minister who toiled in the far West. He commended Christ not only by preaching the Word, but also by his fine, manly character. But his strength is overtaxed, and he dies. From all parts, the ranchers and their wives gather for a simple service. Then amid the grief of the little company which had not appreciated him at his true value, he is borne out to the long, sloping sunny prairie. Then follows this striking word: "Spring has come many times to the canyon since that winter day, and has called to the sleeping flowers, summoning them forth in merry troops, and ever more and more till the canyon ripples with them. And lives are like flowers. In dying, they abide not alone, but sow themselves and bloom again with each returning spring, and ever more and more."

"Lives are like flowers!" That might be an epitaph for Joseph of Arimathæa. He had no idea that the fragrance of his love for Jesus would travel down the years. He did not know that in providing a resting-place for those mortal remains, he was also securing a place for himself among the immortals. There is both challenge and inspiration in the thought.

> "We have as treasure without end
> Whatever, Lord, to Thee we lend."

Is not that the idea conveyed with consummate skill by G. F. Watts, in "Sic Transit"? There we see a shrouded form resting on a bier. Around it are

various articles symbolizing the many-sided interests of the life now closed. There are the book of the scholar, the lute of the musician, the robe of the courtier, and the casque and lance of the knight. An overturned goblet tells of past revelry, but the joy of the hours has fled. The gauntlet suggests the challenge thrown down to life itself; the peacock's feather speaks of pomp and circumstance; while a shell is emblematic of the traveller to foreign shores. Lying apart from the rest, is a crown of laurel. Does this signify fame? Nay, something more enduring, for it is still green and betokens the crown of character. That is plain from the inscription on the wall behind the figure: "What I spent, I had. What I saved, I lost. What I gave, I have."

This is eternally true. The life spent for self is lost; the life lavished for the good of others receives a thousand-fold in return. In enrichment and ennoblement of soul is its sure reward. "It is a happy thing for us," says George MacDonald, "that this is really all we have to concern ourselves about —what is to do *next*. No man can do the second thing; he can do the first." If we would gain the supreme good, we must be good by doing it. If we would declare our love to Christ it must be not in word alone, not in mere protestations of fidelity, but in actions which speak louder than words. These bear witness to the vital faith which sways the soul, and Whittier says of every such resolute heart:

> "If he hath hidden the outcast, or let in
> A ray of sunshine to the cell of sin—

If he hath lent
Strength to the weak, and in an hour of need,
Over the suffering, mindless of his creed
Or home, has bent,
He has not lived in vain. . . .

And while he gives
Praise to God, in whom he moves and lives,
With thankful heart
He gazes backward, and with hope before,
Knowing that from such works he nevermore
Can henceforth part."

XVII

NICODEMUS, THE SENSITIVE

"And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night."
—JOHN 19:39.

LIKE most sensitive people, Nicodemus is greatly misunderstood. Much that has been written and said of his lack of conviction, his hesitancy, his cowardice, is unmerited. Perhaps the emphasis which the Fourth Gospel places on the fact that he "came to Jesus by night" may account for it in some degree. It is singular that, in each of the three passages where John refers to him, this point should be noted. Yet we believe that cowardice is the last thing of which he can be rightly accused. Certain it is that we owe something to him. The deep impression made on his mind by Christ's ministry is increasingly felt as we bring together the three incidents, and for that reason, if for no other, our studies would be incomplete without some attempt to understand this man. The key to such fuller understanding is found in this phrase, "And there came also Nicodemus."

Comparatively early in Christ's public work, it would seem, the attention of this ruler had been centred on the Galilæan Teacher. A deputation had met John the Baptist. They desired some information regarding his mission. And though his words may not have been reported in full to the Sanhedrin,

his reference to the "generation of vipers" could hardly be considered complimentary. But John had spoken of Another, whose way he had come to prepare. That awakened interest. Then when Jesus came, taking up the same theme—the need for repentance and the imminence of the Kingdom—the matter had been thrashed out with considerable heat and no little bitterness in the Sanhedrin itself. All the Elders said in disparagement of Jesus would be known to Nicodemus. Yet he was too familiar with their bias to place any reliance on their opinions. Spiritual matters were of the first moment to him. He felt there was no other course open to him but to make some personal investigations. It was due to Jesus as well as to himself that, instead of being swayed by those who would not err on the side either of accuracy or generosity, he should ascertain who this Man was and what His message involved.

That is only what we might expect from a scholar, a man of deep spirituality, and also one of gentle and retiring disposition. But before he took the venturous step of confronting Christ, he had tried other sources of information, and he became sensitive to the worth of this new Teacher from the north. That is more remarkable than it may seem at first sight. We know that worth. We have the testimony of those who heard Him speak, and whose souls were fired with love for Him as they watched His life. Yet with Nicodemus it was different. There was everything to make due appreciation difficult. Birth and upbringing presented obstacles. The family of Nicodemus was an old and honoured one. He had been carefully educated. All that money and pride could do tended to deepen the gulf

between him and the common people. While the position to which he had been elected—that of membership in the Sanhedrin—was the coping-stone of the ruling caste. Jesus had none of these advantages. It was well-known that He belonged to the ordinary people. Sadder still, for any hope of privilege He might hope to reach, He took no pains to disguise that fact. On the contrary, He seemed to glory in it. Repeatedly He spoke of Himself as the Son of man. Then as a public teacher, He lacked other advantages. He had no academic status; He could not point to any training which fitted Him to be an authority on matters of religion or ethics. And such deficiencies would not be overlooked by a man of Nicodemus's temper and outlook.

Notwithstanding these things, this finely attuned soul felt the sublimity of this Man's nature. There was nothing else for it. He must ascertain for himself what the advent of this great spiritual leader meant. Thus, one night, when the throngs of people had melted from the narrow streets, when the plaintive cries of the mendicants and the raucous voices of the merchants were hushed, Nicodemus set out with beating heart. It was for him the adventure of his life. He had never taken such a plunge before. He was too sensitive about his deepest feelings to exhibit any interest before curious eyes which might misinterpret his motives. He dare not put any question to Jesus with the chance that the Master might misunderstand his motive, and think it were meant to embroil Him in controversy. And a private interview seemed the only way. The Galilæan was wending His way back to His lodging.

He was weary, for none can speak of the things of God, earnestly and feelingly, without virtue going forth from him; none can sympathize with human infirmity and sin without experiencing some deep pain of heart. Jesus felt these things more than any man. Perhaps the disciples had returned to make preparation for the evening meal while the Master dealt with some seeking soul, and He was now making His way home. He was alone, or Nicodemus would have hesitated about speaking so fully of what was on his heart. The quiet was pleasing after the noisy excitement of the pressing multitudes. The last flush of sunset had almost gone, reminding us of the colour that lingers on a maiden's cheek as one beloved has said his words of farewell for the night. "Dear God! the very houses seem asleep!" And Christ stops for a moment to look over the city, nestling down beneath the soft-falling veil of night. None but He could discern the disease which set its pulse throbbing with fevered beat! None but He could know the ache and heart-break enclosed by every city's walls.

As Christ moves on again, a shadow falls across His way. A footfall is heard. Who addresses Him? The tones are those of a cultured man. Jesus turns to see one who, by his attire, plainly belongs to the elect of Jerusalem. He is a ruler of the people. It is just possible that a medical man, returning home after a long day in the hospital, might feel annoyed were he called on for some new case. It is possible that some distinguished preacher who has held a vast audience enthralled, and who is aware that he has reached the limits of endurance, might feel resentment when some critical

enquirer presses forward to take him to task for something said or left unsaid. It is utterly impossible for Christ to be anything but responsive and willing to help a soul in straits. Nicodemus, who had been tormented with doubt, yet who shrank from accosting the Master at all, must have felt that. That is why he acted as he did.

His earnestness may be judged by his mode of address. "Rabbi, we know that Thou art a Teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles which Thou doest except God be with Him." That demonstrates how much this ruler had been impressed by the worth and work of Jesus. He gives our Lord a title of honour and respect to which He could not lay academic claim,—Rabbi!—and our minds are startled by his admission that this Teacher came from God. *Apo theou,* on the lips of this exclusive Pharisee! What can be the significance? Certainly he had thrown all reserve aside. Yet this is neither compliment nor fulsome flattery, meant to take Christ by storm. It is the candour of a heart convinced. While between this aristocrat of aristocrats and this Democrat we might suspect the existence of an unbridgeable gulf, it is beyond question that Nicodemus knew he had found his Master.

The ruler's reference to the miracles brings us within hearing of echoes of controversy. The matter had been before the Council. That Jesus did many notable works could not be denied, but whence His power? Nicodemus had settled that question. "No man can do these miracles . . . except God be with Him." Yet how came He from God? Were not His parents known to the rulers? The two statements had seemed irreconcilable. Sup-

pose this Man were an impostor, He possessed a power which even His opponents could not deny, though they might differ about its source. And this doctor of the law found himself hopelessly involved. The maze of interpretations of Mosaic tradition and law was nothing compared with this. This Man might be false; yet His words rang true. He was trying to impose on the credulity of the people, said some; yet His love for them could not be gainsaid. He was wicked; yet could the bad do good? And on the battlefield of the soul Nicodemus had seen the struggle go on. Then a word of Christ's teachings brought victory. "By their fruits ye shall know them. . . ." This Man must be other than the Elders said.

Emboldened by the progress he had made, Nicodemus faced Jesus with his other difficulties. For he is one of the sincere enquirers whom Tennyson had in mind when he wrote:

> "There is more faith in honest doubt,
> Believe me, than in half the creeds."

He cannot commit himself until he knows more. He must not involve the good name of the rulers by any action taken in his private capacity. But more important still, he must discuss his difficulties with this Teacher in circumstances which will enable him to talk without interruption from outside. He is sensitive; these matters mean too much to be dragged in the dust of party strife. And so, no longer as a term of reproach, but rather as indicating the deep seriousness of the man, we think of him as coming to Jesus by night.

That the darkness enfolded his mind as well as his form can be noted from the conversation which followed. Jesus divined his purpose. He knew this was no mere quibbler, who had come to argue a point in His teaching. It was no digger of pitfalls, camouflaging his real mission with religious phrases. He was a seeker for truth. And the night comes before the dawn. Jesus paid him the honour of imparting fuller truth. Yet as the Master spoke of the new birth, instead of clearing up the mystery it seemed to grow deeper. To the mind of the rabbi, steeped in literalism, and fast-bound by tradition, it seemed an impossible thing to be born again. For as we know, nothing hinders growth in grace and progress in truth like preconceived ideas. And one of the sublime truths of God's revelation of Himself to the human mind is this: "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." The ruler realized that before the interview terminated. He was one who had climbed until he had reached what he thought was the summit of the mountain. Yet a mighty and unscaleable height towered before his eyes. But is not that one of Christ's greatest blessings to the soul? He lifts the mind above the easily grasped, where contentment may enthrall, and brings it a vision of the sublimities of God. Nicodemus had to think over this further revelation. But Christ's words are never meant to bewilder and overwhelm the soul. He brings hope by which the goal may yet be won and the blessing be assured.

The effects of that interview can be seen in the second incident in which Nicodemus figures. Day

after day, while the wrangling of the Sanhedrin became more difficult to endure, this thoughtful soul pondered the truth to which he had come. His heart was incensed by the shameful things his fellow-senators said about Jesus. Yet he could not be sufficiently sure of his ground to challenge their ruling on this new Teacher. He wanted to be fair. He had spoken to Jesus privately because he did not wish to cause any public comment on his action as one of the Sanhedrin. He could not lay bare his own spiritual solicitude to the curious gaze of the crowd. But still he was uneasy. How should he act? Night after night he had wrestled with his problem. He could not yet comprehend all Jesus had said. He did, however, feel that he understood Jesus better. And his heart was filled with deep affection and admiration for one so gracious. Give it time, and such love will reveal itself. Among the moors of Scotland, one sometimes comes across a strange streak of green, fresh grass, straggling through the heather. The contrast is too marked not to be striking. The eye follows its direction, while the mind enquires the reason. There is an underground streamlet. It is that which feeds the gleaming grass. And the course of its flow can be noted by the effect it produces. So it is with those who, sensitive to Christ's worth and work, may love Him without demonstrativeness or declamation. Not that we eulogize the silent tongue; the spoken word of loyalty may achieve much. But neither do we apologize for it, if there be the eloquent life. Sooner or later, in word or deed, love will speak its passion.

Time went on. More than a year had elapsed

before we hear Nicodemus's voice. Jesus had continued His ministry of enlightenment and ennobling, and His enemies had been unable to compass His ruin. Some six months before the final blow fell, however, He had reappeared in the Capital. The time seemed opportune. Orders were issued for His arrest. This was entrusted to part of the Temple guard. But when the officers came back, they did so empty-handed. "Why have ye not brought Him?" The question blazed on the lips of the president. They had counted on getting Him into their power while the chances were in their favour, and the Council had been brought to that pitch of feeling in which unanimity might be secured. The reply was as maddening as it was inconclusive. "Never man spake like this Man!"

Was it the glowing periods of Christ's preaching? Was it the magnificent sweep of His mind, and the spell of His oratory? Or was it the tenderness, the blending of divinity and humanity, the indefinable, mystic power of the Man Himself, touching the soul as the musician brings forth the long, plaintive moan, or the gladsome, lilting strains from the same violin? We cannot answer that. It is sufficient to say that the arrest was not carried out. It seemed an inadequate excuse. The officers felt it now, looking no longer into that winsome face, but into the eyes of their superiors. And they quailed before the biting sarcasm of their questioner. "Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on Him? But this people that knoweth not the law are cursed!"

There was one present to whom the reference to the unbelief of the rulers had a personal challenge.

He could not sit silent. It was Nicodemus. Nerving himself to speak he asked, "Doth our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doeth?" The question was meant as a protest, but its importance in the mind of the president can be measured by his chilling rejoinder. "Art thou also of Galilee? Search and look, for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet!" The questioner was silenced, and the Council stood adjourned. This sensitive soul was wounded by the barbed shaft. A man cast in a different mould might have done more. Yet it had cost him much to speak even this faltering word on Christ's behalf. Not that we would make excuses for him; we simply seek to understand one of his temperament. We could wish he had been like Portia, who, stirred by the injustice to which Antonio had been subjected by the malice of Shylock, stood forth to plead his cause. We could wish that like John Bright or Edmund Burke, he had lifted his voice to protect the weak and succour the oppressed. That is not the point. Being what he was, shrinking and sensitive, it were something that he made his protest in face of such strong opposition. And in tracing the development of his soul, we find that Phillips Brooks is a sure guide. "Jesus does for Nicodemus," says that gifted divine, "the three things which every thorough teacher must do for every scholar. He gives him new ideas, He deepens with these ideas his personal character and responsibility, and he builds for him new relations with his fellow-men. When Nicodemus goes away from Jesus, he carries with him the new truth of regeneration; he is trembling with the sense that, to make that truth thoroughly his, he himself must

be a better man; and by and by, he is seen setting himself against the current of his fellow-judges to speak a word for the Master."

When subsequently the infamous plottings of the priests came to a head, and Jesus was slain, Nicodemus reveals the still further development which had taken place. While Joseph secured Pilate's consent to let him inter the body of our Lord, John's narrative gives us this conclusive proof of the other's affection, "And there came also, Nicodemus." Such love as his takes time to mature, but it comes to its own eventually. And though it was still the same man who came at first by night, there was the dawning glory of a new day for him. His fragrant spices were not more sweet in their perfume than the soul in which Christ was then enthroned. Still, it would have been a finer thing if Nicodemus had openly declared his love for Christ. Secret discipleship is not to be despised. Yet frank acknowledgment of the soul's surrender to His rule would accomplish more.

> "A few more flowers strewn on the pathway of life,
> And fewer on graves at the end of the strife,"

would certainly bring increased happiness to the world. And while the Master does not scorn the love of the humblest, the service of the lowliest, though it be expressed in secret, yet that discipleship which is ashamed of nothing but its unworthiness, can be of unspeakable value both to Him and to His cause. That is where the advantage of definite decision comes in, and the value of Church membership is seen. We do not imply that those who are

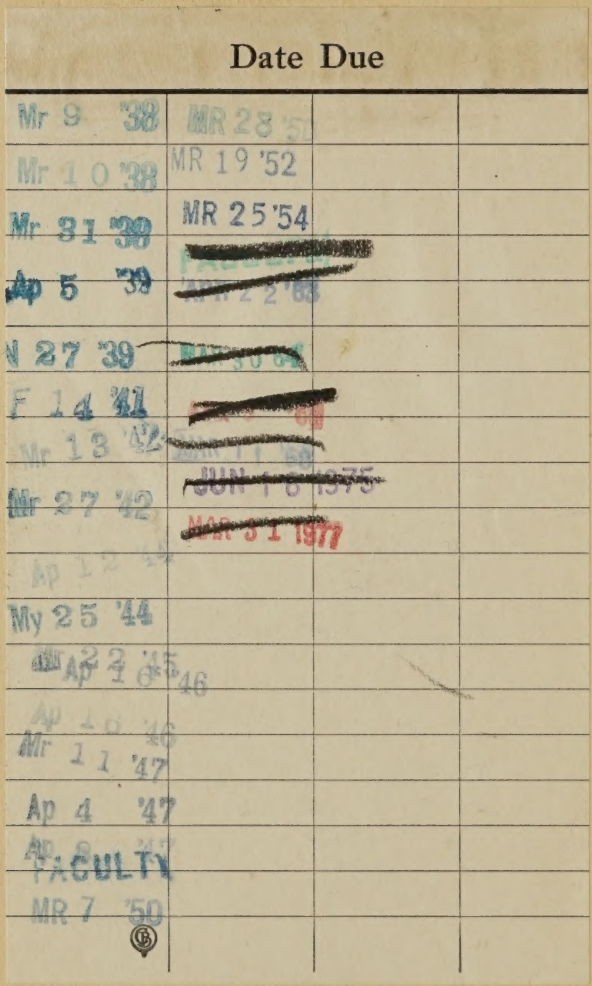
enrolled in the ranks of the Church are any better than they ought to be; we do mean that they may be better than they are! We do not diminish the value of such quiet, steady growth in grace which Nicodemus showed; we do emphasize the ultimate emergence to a fine fidelity which his life found.

Christ is worthy of the finest service we can render. We have seen something of what He endured "for us men and our salvation." We have stood by, amid human hate and scorn, filled with reverent wonder at His sublime fortitude and love. Can we ever become so familiar with the facts of our faith that they leave us uninspired and unmoved? Yet the beauties of the world meet with little response. "What would a blind man give," asks Izaak Walton, "to see the pleasant rivers, and meadows, and flowers, and fountains that we have met with? I have been told that if a man that was born blind could have his sight but for only one hour during his whole life, and should, at the first opening of his eyes, fix his sight upon the sun when it was in its full glory, either at the rising or setting of it, he would be so transported and amazed, and so admire the glory of it, that he would not willingly turn his eyes from that first ravishing object to behold all the other various beauties this world could present to him. And this, and many other like blessings, we enjoy daily; and for most of them, because they are so common, most men forget to pay their praises. But let not us, because it is a sacrifice so pleasing to Him that made the sun and us, and still protects us, and gives us flowers and showers, and meat and content." All of which goes so far that we would fain go further. The Sun of

Righteousness has shone on earth's darkened sphere. It has pierced the gloom of sin and sorrow, bringing hope of a fairer day and the gladness of fellowship with the Father of light. It has revealed the way to blessedness and peace. It has shown us the path of life in which, by service to our fellow-men, we may pour out our love to God. And not only in the faces of these women and men who loved Christ and sought to share His travail, but also in the face of the Master Himself, we see the joy of serving.

Moved by His love for mankind, humbled and yet inspired by His unconquerable faith in frail humanity, let us set our hearts on hastening the day of His victory. Many a difficulty will confront us. Many a discouragement will have to be mastered. Yet Christ shall be our inspiration. Through that week of doom He came to His throne. He shall yet see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied. The day will yet dawn when His dominion shall be complete, and men of every nation, and kindred and people, and tongue, shall crown Him Lord of all.

THE END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